FAIR GAMES:
PLAY, CAPITAL, AND THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE IMAGINATION

by
Robert Tinkle

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ABSTRACT

Fair Games challenges conventional wisdom about play and work by proposing that these modes of activity be understood not in binary opposition but rather as mutually-constitutive cultural relations, especially during the transition to capitalism in England. In early modern studies, play has been read nearly exclusively in a festival or mass-entertainment context, more or less sharply differentiated from the rhythms of working life. I propose that a richer understanding of the relational life of early modernity emerges if we read play not only in the language of recreation or pastime but also as a peculiar set of habits that develop from within the logics of work, especially in the forms work takes under capital. In its pursuit of profit and encouragement of competition, capitalist political economy synthesizes the productive logic of work with the creativity and plasticity of play. The modes of interpersonal relation that develop within such a framework, even in its early stages, are shaped by the contradictions of expropriation versus surplus, volatility versus stability, that capitalism uniquely demands, so that social interaction itself comes to adopt the affective and relational logic of games.

The literature of the long sixteenth century tracks the development of these relations with particular clarity, piquancy, and wit. In chapters on Thomas More, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, and Ben Jonson, I explore various habits of play—as witty rhetoric, erotic bid, a penchant for risk, or as con-game—that emerge not simply in contrast to more formal work relations but rather as mutually determinative with them, structuring social relations in highly productive ways. This cultural studies approach to work and play is guided by the conviction that both cultural and economic exchange have always been elastic, but that this elasticity is augmented

by the formal particularities of capital. By paying attention to play not just as institutional entertainment bound to a theater or other playing arena, but also as a lived practice mediated by literary representation, we get a more intimate picture of the affective life of capital that continues into the present day.

Primary Reader and Advisor: Sharon Achinstein

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For my parents, who taught me how to play

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"Happiness (*eudaimonia*), therefore, does not consist in play (*paidia*).
For it would be strange if our end (*telos*) were play….But to play so
that one may be serious, as Anacharis has it, seems to be correct."
—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.6

"There be some sports are painful, and their labor
Delight in them sets off. […]
[…] This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead
And makes my labors pleasures."
—Ferdinand, *The Tempest* 3.1.1-7

"It's a rich man's game, no matter what they call it."
—Dolly Parton, "9 to 5"

Fair Games opens with a wager: that we can learn as much about the early life of capitalism by looking at play as we can by looking at work. Further, play and work are not as conceptually distinct as we usually take them to be, owing to the ways in which capitalism transforms the nature of all activity.[1] The infusion of play into work is a cultural phenomenon that I ascribe to the emergence of a capitalistic economy in England. My argument engages a few moving parts: that economic upheaval in the long sixteenth century produced new cultural relations of play and work (but without suggesting that these relations were always understood as such); that the changes were registered in various ways in the period's literary output; and that the categories play and work we have inherited were discursively constructed during and following this period yet were also rendered less stable by that very discursivity. What *Fair Games* offers, then, is a new account of play: of what play is, where it shows up, how it gets practiced, and what its relationship is to work.

[1] Richard Halpern's recent *Eclipse of Action* makes a tremendously cogent argument about the ways that the capitalist imperative on production debilitates action, understood largely in the Arendtian sense as a form of entrance into political life. See Halpern, *Eclipse of Action: Tragedy and Political Economy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2017).

This account is in part theoretical and in greater part literary-historical; English literary texts from the century spanning 1516 to 1611 are registering a cultural transition in which both work relations and play relations are under significant pressure. I am interested in deciphering what the period's representations of these relations reveal about the sensuous overlap of these two kinds of activity; or, put another way, in what they reveal about our early conditioning into capitalist subjects.

The first thing to clarify is that I am identifying play with something other than the vibrant picture of carnival festivity that has become associated, in the popular imagination, with a deeply aestheticized and commodified *Renaissance*. The word "play," used of this era, no doubt conjures visions of jousting tournaments, banquets, jesters and clowns, stage plays, card games, mummings, May Day festivities—all the delights that entice any visitor to the weirdly transtemporal county Renaissance fair. In early modernity, these festival forms of play became a source of cultural tension between the Puritans who disapproved of them and the royal court that sought to promote them as extensions of state and ecclesiastical power, tensions which came to a head in King James's issuing of the *Book of Sports* in 1618.[2] The festal or magic circle account of play—play as *event* demarcated temporally and substantively from the other kinds of activity that precede and succeed it—has remained more or less the only available account in early modern studies of the cultural life of play.[3] Disarticulating play from its festal contexts, I offer that we read capitalism itself as a vast economic game, structurally engendering a kind of match between its actors who begin to face one another as rivals and, in many senses, as co-players in competitive markets. I mean this as something other than a familiar metaphor: as my readings of early modern drama,

[2] For more on this see Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986).

[3] The most emphatic proponent in play theory of a rigid boundary between play and non-play is, perhaps, Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games* [1961], trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2001). Many play theorists have been hesitant to draw any sharp or totalizing division between games and life, but the concept of the magic circle—which, to be sure, does have a strong utility and appeal—remains important for play theory and has been implicit in approaches to what "play" means in early modern studies.

poetry, and utopian narrative hope to show, early modern English people understood their own emotional and relational lives in something like these terms.

Borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus, I take "play" to be expressive of cultural relations, attitudes, and dispositions that are often ambivalently marked and not always identifiable (perhaps unsatisfyingly so) with any particular activity, social formation, or mode of production. My later chapters, on the literature of merchant capitalism, center various forms of risk-taking, from long-distance trade to financial wager to urban scam, yet only the first of these can properly be called an economic "practice" related to the dominant modes of production, distribution, and exchange. Yet the indispensability of long-distance trade, with all of its attendant risks, for a commercialist market means the reification of a certain sensibility for risk in the wider culture, experienced in this case (within the terms of my analysis) as a tension between the work of calculation and the play of chance. The social life of risk is thus characterized by a certain feeling for play, sometimes tethered to risky profession (like that of the merchant) and other times expressed more spontaneously—as a wager between friends or rivals, for example. Play shows up, so to speak, from within the life of work.

The many ways in which work changed during the so-called transition to capitalism have been well-documented. In general labor was becoming more itinerant, centered less on the guild and more on the temporary contract, producing "more casual economic arrangements" than most people had hitherto been accustomed.[4] In William Shakespeare's Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, the drunken sot Christopher Sly identifies himself as "old Sly's son of Burton-heath, by birth a pedlar, by education a cardmaker, by transmutation a bearherd, and now by present profession a tinker," comically attesting to the variability of work arrangements in a post-feudal

[4] Michelle M. Dowd and Natasha Korda, "Introduction," in *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1.

economy.[5] Inevitably, these changes to work also had effects on the ways people played. The perhaps counterintuitive claim I am making is that this play had everything to do *with* the nature of work, with the ways work "transmuted" people, to borrow Sly's alchemical term. As tracked by the period's literary output, play could be productive even as work demanded a certain facility for playing. This literature associates productive play with a rising gentry, though often with people of less means as well, distinguishing it from the perceived idleness both of the very poor and the aristocracy. Untethered from feudal ties of troth and pledged fealty, though still in many ways conceptually beholden to them, sixteenth-century men and women found themselves in a burgeoning financial marketplace where wit rather than feudal obligation had become the instrument of economic survival, and where the circulation of coin in new and expanded markets was actually producing new forms of affective relation. To navigate this rapidly-changing market world, it was necessary to think like a player, to marshal one's resources toward gaming the new economic demands that were restructuring daily life.

The second thing to clarify is that, while I don't mean to conflate play with pleasure, I take it for granted that all forms of play are to some degree pleasurable, that pleasure is indeed an objective rather than simply a by-product of play. This means that play is often in close proximity to the erotic, understood in terms not just of sexual contact but also of a more diffuse range of affects for which sexual contact could be proxy, even if it is never realized. Early modern writers, as Melissa Sanchez has shown, often turned to the language of eros to describe the circuits of domination and subjection that defined the political relation between sovereign and subject.[6] So too, I offer, did these writers represent economic activity—the exchange of commodities, or of

[5] William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Dympna Callaghan (New York: Norton, 2009), Ind.2.17-19. Dowd and Korda are also interested in what these lines suggest about the transient character of early modern work.
[6] See Melissa Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

bodies performing certain kinds of work for others—as quickened by an erotic energy. Erotic play is thus a function of political economy, not only as representational figuration but also as a lived, felt attribute of changing political-economic relations. In *The Tempest*'s Ferdinand we find an instructive example of the economy eroticized. Enlisted by Prospero to transport wood—work that should be degrading for the aristocratic son of the King of Naples—Ferdinand nevertheless finds pleasure in his labors since his drudgery is an amorous investment in his new mistress, Miranda. There can be pleasure in work just as there is in play, but Ferdinand is clear that his "mean task," otherwise "heavy" and "odious," has been eroticized *into* play; the ontological status of his activity, in other words, adapts in response to a social imaginary rather than to any change in the activity he performs. While this particular relation is not a capitalistic one, capitalism similarly fabricates "a certain regime of desire" through which a person is compelled, at first externally and then increasingly internally, to work for another and is remunerated based on the perceived value of their service, the basic model of wage labor.[7] I thus flag the erotic now (there will be more to say about it further down) to suggest the centrality that the play of desire has for work relations under capital, even and perhaps especially in a period when these relations were still fledgling. An imaginary of both playful work and laborious play, figured through early modern writers' curiosity about the relation between pleasure and profit, energizes the literary life of early modern England.

Indeed, if profit necessarily entails a superabundance or excess, enabling at least the possibility of pleasurable expenditure, then it too slides into the conceptual life of play (and here I'll note that "spending" could refer in the period to both financial and sexual discharge). While economic discourse, whether Marxian, neoliberal, or otherwise, approaches profit as a more or less neutral analytic category, its proximity to more loaded concepts like excess, waste, luxury,

[7] Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire* (London: Verso, 2014), 49.

spending, or surfeit suggests a crossover into the field of play that, as I have been proposing, is registered by the imaginative writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[8] During this period, uses of the financial meaning of "profit" were accelerating even as profit continued to signify, more generally, a "favorable circumstance," "advantage," or "benefit" of various non-financial kinds.[9] While I don't mean to lean too heavily on this term, I am interested in the ways that an economic system in which social reproduction depends on the continual turning of profits on a mass scale shapes a relational life with a certain extremity or extravagance, an "amping up" of the necessary means for attaining profit in part because this attainment becomes conflated with productivity. One proves oneself productive, that is, not merely by laboring but by performing. I use "labor" to signify something systemic—the dominant modes of production, division of labor, and so on—and "work" to signify something more discrete, the particular acts that are expressive of labor's structural imperatives. Thus, "performing" can signify either work or play, or, as I have been teasing out, both of these kinds of activity at once. I frame things this way to reiterate that play is not an entirely autonomous zone of activity pursuing its own inward-facing pleasure. Rather, the life of play is deeply implicated in the life of profit, expressed even in the era of primitive accumulation in terms of a surplus of bodies and goods locked in competitive rivalry for a share in those profits.

This leads me to my third point of clarification—what, exactly, is the relation I've proposed between play and political economy, especially if play can't always be readily identified with any

[8] As Alison V. Scott argues, concepts like excess, indulgence, and luxury were beginning to lose some of their moralistic resonance around the turn of the seventeenth century as England's commercial culture rapidly expanded. Luxury, for example, which in the medieval Augustinian tradition was nearly synonymous with lechery or lust, came to acquire the more commercialistic overtones with which we now associate the term. This commercialization was fully reified by the eighteenth century, but earlier periods found competing and complex resonances in "luxury"; I think something similar is afoot with "profit." See Scott, *Literature and the Idea of Luxury in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

[9] *OED*, s.v., "profit, *n*.," 1a; see also "profit, *n*.," 5.

particular economic practice? Without being reductive about the relationship between an economic base and a cultural superstructure, I want to reaffirm Marx's critique of Hegelian idealism in insisting upon "the formation of ideas from material practice"; thus, to return to the example of risk, the seeds of play are in some way already buried within the material practices of mercantile trade out of which grows a cultural sensibility for risky play.[10] But I also want to offer that play has a certain usefulness for interrogating what sometimes tend to show up in Marx as encrusted sets of relations—for example, the notion that under capital "each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape."[11] This formulation succeeds as an assessment of the ways in which capitalism reproduces uneven development, consistently distributing its greatest share of profits in some directions and not others; but it has a harder time accounting for movement, change, disruption, exception, and agency, especially in a transitional period where the question of economic "force" seems to me a rather vexed one. As Stuart Hall observes, the tension between culture and other discursive formations (like economics) is always dialectical: "There's always something decentered about the medium of culture," he writes, "…which always escapes and evades the attempt to link it, directly and immediately, with other structures. And yet, at the same time, the shadow, the imprint, the trace, of those other formations…can never be erased."[12] Culture seems to have its hand in everything, to show up everywhere, a kind of totality that is yet greater than the sum of its parts. This ought not to imply its evasiveness or imprecision as an object of inquiry; rather, in the spirit of play, I want to insist that culture's wonderfully productive elasticity is one of its analytical strengths.[13] Thus, while *Fair*

[10] Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," in *The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 164.
[11] Marx, "The German Ideology," 160.
[12] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies," in *The Cultural Studies Reader, Third Edition*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 41.
[13] The academy's relationship to cultural studies has been a somewhat vexed one in recent years, its durable institutional presence belied by a certain wariness about its seeming antidisciplinarity, its hesitation to define what

Games is something other than an apologia for cultural study, I do hope that its contribution to a cultural rereading of play and work can be taken up in useful ways by other discursive fields.

Further, it strikes me that the question of economic "force" cannot be addressed in isolation since, to return to the period under consideration, early modern people would have felt their activity shaped and encroached upon not only by the intensive reshaping of modes of production but also by an increasingly centralizing, authoritarian Tudor state. I say this not to suggest any splintering between the political and the economic but, quite the opposite, to underline that the state exercises a high degree of oversight of economic life in this period, whether to stimulate growth (as in Queen Elizabeth's royal chartering of the East India Company in 1600) or to construct and exercise some form of biopolitical power over those it deems economic bad agents, like vagabonds and the unemployed (as in the many Tudor poor laws). In general "the gradual emergence of capitalist markets and capitalist relations of production was made possible by the state," as Henry Heller succinctly puts it.[14] As my example of the EIC implies, state intervention was very often at the behest of colonialist competition between emerging European nation-states, so that the English relations I discuss throughout this book cannot be understood apart from the emergence of global capitalism (this will be given more consideration in the chapter on Christopher Marlowe). Furthermore, we must understand the gradual emergence of capitalist

"culture" means to begin with or to articulate a clear-eyed political program. Paul Smith, for example, calls for "a new kind of identity for cultural studies," one invested in "identifying both the procedures and the objects that cultural studies will take on and that it will work with consistently and foundationally" ("Introduction," in *The Renewal of Cultural Studies*, ed. Smith [Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2011], 2).

[14] Henry Heller, *The Birth of Capitalism: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective* (Pluto Press, 2011), 11. Heller notes that "nations like Italy and Germany that failed to become unified states saw their nascent capitalist development arrested, while capitalism was consolidated in Holland, France, and England by the constitution of a territorial state" (11). For more on the early modern state's role in economic development, see Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Bruce R. Scott, *Capitalism: Its Origins and Evolution as a System of Governance* (New York: Springer, 2011); and Robert S. DuPlessis, *Transitions to Capitalism in Early Modern Europe: Economies in the Era of Early Globalization, c. 1450-1820*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019), esp. 53-90.

markets as being in some ideological tension with itself, since cultural relations both shape and are shaped by state power and modes of production. As Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, productive systems "confront people who must *act* in relation to them" and are thus "living social phenomena"; base and superstructure exist not simply in relation to one another as discrete spheres but as fully integrated elements of a total social fabric.[15] The economic base is constituted, through and through, by social relations and not just by abstracted economic practices.[16]

Owing to the transecting character of power in early modern political economy, I want to loosely develop in relation to "play" what I call a bioeconomics of early capitalist modernity. I use this term in an idiosyncratic way to denote the privileging of the body as the sensuous site of economic gain and loss, differentiated from Jean-Christophe Agnew's more structural model of the impersonal "placeless market" that has been influentially identified with the economic transition of the long sixteenth century.[17] While I don't think Agnew's model is erroneous, it has gone some way toward erasing the importance that kinship and other affinitive networks still held in the period, as work by Richard Grassby, Margaret Hunt, Craig Muldrew, and others has shown in different ways.[18] In bioeconomics I am trying to redeem the localized, personalized character of most forms of economic exchange, the ways in which the feeling, acting body face-to-face with other transactors is made to bear the signs of its own economic aliveness. Yet these acts of

[15] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* [1995] (London: Verso, 2016), 25, emphasis original.
[16] See Wood, 49-75; and E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978). The relationship between economic and cultural practice has been an enduring subject of debate for world-systems theory as articulated by Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the Capitalist World System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16.4 (1974): 387-415; and *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* [1976] (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2011).
[17] Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).
[18] See Richard Grassby, *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995); Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996); and Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

exchange happen under the aegis of a state that threatens always to punish that body for debts unpaid, for not holding steady work, for lack of patronage, for charging interest beyond the legal limit, or for any other number of economic infractions. At a time when so-called masterless men were vigorously policed and often hanged and when jails were proverbially crowded with debtors, the state's biopolitical power over life and death, to paraphrase Michel Foucault, was no doubt felt looming over economic relations to a degree of intensity that has since been largely diminished by the eventual triumph of the placeless market.[19] But while the state and its legal arms show up in many of the texts I examine, an everpresent reminder of its delimiting power, they are just as often successfully flouted by wily actors, or prove to be less effectual than anticipated. Thus, there is a way in which even this seemingly totalizing institutional power is resisted by the body at play, whose excesses challenge and sometimes successfully repel the agents that seek its social and biological destruction. My readings of literary merchants, con-artists, shepherds, usurers, agricultural laborers, slaves, and others in distinctly economic casts will be sensitive to how the body at play seeks to alter, break through, manipulate, or otherwise contest patterns of labor and exchange shaped by state, family, kinship, and other sociopolitical networks.

I adapt the term bioeconomics advisedly from the significant work on biopolitics theorized by Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe, and others—advisedly because, as Warren Montag writes, each insists upon "the separation of the polis and the *oikos*, the political and the economic, the man-made realm of freedom and the natural realm of necessity."[20] Drawing from Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, where the state not only has distributive power over life and death but in fact prioritizes the latter especially in the racialized postcolony, Montag offers that

[19] See Michel Foucault, "Right of Death and Power Over Life" [1976], in *Biopolitics: A Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2013), 41-60.
[20] Warren Montag, "Necro-Economics: Adam Smith and Death in the Life of the Universal" [2005], in *Biopolitics*, 201.

Smithian political economy naturalizes death as an inevitable outcome of the market, as necessary to its functioning as growth or profit, and that the state intervenes only when certain subjects "refuse to allow themselves to die [and] must be compelled by force to do so."[21] This "necro-economics" offers an important extension of biopower's more restricted focus on the political, even if its particular purchase lies beyond the scope of my argument insofar as "necro" would spell the final limit of play (though it is worth noting that one of the subjects of this book, Marlowe's Barabas, literally plays himself to death). Yet all is not necro for Mbembe, who also writes compellingly on postcolonial displays of the Bakhtinian grotesque, or what he terms its "aesthetics of vulgarity," among subjects and ruling elites alike. The postcolonial "subject's deployment of a talent for play, of a sense of fun," Mbembe writes, is what "makes him *homo ludens par excellence*" and "enables subjects to splinter their identities and to represent themselves as always changing their persona."[22] This is the spirit in which I also understand the development and expression of playful subjectivity in Tudor and Jacobean England, even if the historic context is radically different from that of the postcolony; that is, as a particular modality of survival (in some cases) or of social advancement (in others) whose playfulness consists in the ability to manipulate the self and its representations for profit. These are bodies that resist and contest the systems that envelop them in order, ultimately, to find some measure of success within them.

What constitutes its bioeconomic character is the way in which, as I've said, the body calls attention to its own status as this or that kind of economic actor, sensuously performing its own gain or loss. Bodies in disguise, making wagers, verbally sparring, courting a wealthy lover, and so on make themselves vulnerable to discovery, to losing the wager or verbal match, to being denied their erotic bid, and are thus ambivalently positioned between the downward pressure of

[21] Montag, 211.
[22] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001), 104.

impersonal forces and the lateral moves they make in seeking their own profit. I most explicitly develop this theme in my final chapter when I turn to a bioeconomics of risk, which involves the theatrical performance of a fraudulent self-in-disguise vulnerable to discovery and legal punishment, but it lurks in some form or another behind all of my readings. While the intervention of state power allows or prohibits the body's ability to profit, I am interested in how the body at play also resists or evades these logics by transforming itself into the kind of body that *is* legible to the market—which is to say, to other potential transactors. The texts I look at are thus interested in a certain discontinuity between the impersonality of market forces and the sensuous intimacies of exchange, which makes all economic activity, in some sense or another, inherently risky.

I will say more in what follows about how my understanding of early modern play differs from that of the new historicism, which grew out of cultural studies and which similarly toggles between Marx and Foucault. For now, I offer the disclaimer that *Fair Games* is not intended as a fully-fledged economic analysis of what happens to either work or play under capitalism; it assumes the transition to capitalism as the material foundation of a cultural turn and looks only sparingly at early economic treatises. Its commitments are, rather, to the literary texts themselves as aesthetic objects both produced by and respondent to their political, economic, and social milieux. I approach work and play as cultural categories and their early modern articulation as mediated through the texts that culturally-interested writers produced. Through these engagements, I hope to illuminate something about the affective life of capital, our eventual conditioning into capitalist subjects for whom work is meant to be pleasurable and play is meant to reify the skills of work. Indeed, while the scope of this book is limited to a single century, this reimagining of work and play has had lasting implications into our own late-capitalist era.

I. THEORIZING PLAY | PLAYING WITH THEORY

Fair Games challenges familiar, transhistorical definitions of work (the "business" of life) and play, identified with everything that is not work—idleness, leisure, recreation, and so on. It does so in the spirit of Marx's analysis of the ways "sensuous activity" changes under capital, but means to include play in this activity where for Marx the term indicates primarily the social relations of labor.[23] However, as I've theorized it, play is a bit like work under capital since, as a set of social and cultural relations, it too comes with a certain productive capacity.

If a peculiar ludic drive was already in some way baked into the logics of capital, surplus, and competition from the beginning, the discursive formulation of play-as-work originates, in many ways, in the Italian Renaissance, and in particular in Niccolò Machiavelli. In *The Prince*, begun sometime around 1510, Machiavelli counsels that the prince ought to act how it would be best to act in the current circumstances, operating by something more like a playbook than a strict rulebook. Fortune and the whims of other people can be counteracted by the virtues of prudence, wisdom, decision, and necessity. Great rulers, as Machiavelli more sinisterly puts it in chapter XVIII, "have known how, by their cunning, to muddle the brains of men, and in the end have got the better of those who have based themselves on sincerity."[24] In early modern England, the Italian principalities were feared, ridiculed, and condemned for this politics of opportunism, frequently euphemized in English as the "Italian wit." It's notable for my argument that this opportunism was often described, by both Italian and English observers, precisely in terms of a bodily tension between work and play, the productive and unproductive, or business and idleness. George Puttenham, for instance, reflecting in his *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) on "the Princes Courts of

[23] Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 143.
[24] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, Second Edition*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019), 59.

Italie," claimed of its courtiers that they "seeme idle when they be earnestly occupied and entend to nothing but mischievous practizes, and do busily negotiat by coulor of otiation."[25] Machiavellianism was thus understood not only in terms of deceitful rhetorical maneuvers but also as a certain behavioral disposition that makes occupation seem like idleness, negotiation seem like leisure—a rich formulation that raises questions about what play and work, *otium* and *negotium*, "ought" to look like. And in Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528), *sprezzatura* or the appearance of effortlessness in one's speech and bearing is a celebration of the ways exertion is made to look like play. "Let him laugh, jest, banter, romp, and dance," says Count Ludovico of the ideal courtier, "though in a fashion that always reflects good sense and discretion, and let him say and do everything with grace."[26] This image, far less sinister than Puttenham's, reflects the same courtly ethos of shaping oneself—self-fashioning—in a way that confuses the boundaries between play and business.

Skeptical and even hostile as most English people were to the Italian and papal courts, this Italian tradition of witty artifice nonetheless finds its way into the broader patterns of daily life once capitalism begins to emerge in England. What was once the aristocratic skill of self-fashioning becomes a dominant mode by which non-aristocrats navigate economic precarity in volatile and increasingly competitive markets. I don't mean to suggest a seamless or intentional translation from court to marketplace—nor is the art of *sprezzatura* the same thing as manipulating oneself into the domestic service of a desirable house, for instance. Rather, I argue that the culture of virtuosic display and political expediency that motivated the courtly arts of self-promotion, in England as in Italy, are echoed in the culture of ingenuity making itself felt in the rapidly-changing

[25] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, A Facsimile Reproduction (Kent: Kent State Univ. Press, 1970), 308. Reproduced in Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 88.
[26] Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), 64.

rhythms of sixteenth-century life. A slew of familiar terms enters the English language in precisely this century to classify and systemize what it is that people do, from "profession," "entertainment," and "job" to "sport" and "stratagem," all poised at what Sianne Ngai calls the "politically ambiguous intersection between…playing and laboring" characteristic especially of itinerant work, "a place where occupational and cultural performance already intersect."[27] The transition to wage labor and, in general, the difficulty of finding steady work in sixteenth-century England demanded a new kind of habitus closely related to performance and thus, conceptually, to play. The figure of the stage Machiavel, deployed with special creativity by Marlowe, seems to show up wherever political and economic instability demanded such a habitus, suggesting a certain instinct among early modern writers for turning to the Italian context to help make sense of and in some ways respond to English crises.

For many theorists of play, especially before the rise of capital, the denial of productive capacity is precisely what had distinguished play from work. Work is a teleological activity, directed toward the production of some good, whereas play is a purposeless end-in-itself, useful only to the extent that it provides refreshment from work. This is the tradition that runs through Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, who proposed that "sports are not means to ends but are sought for their own sake" and identified "playing" as one of those acts that "do not appear to be purposeful."[28] The transition to capitalism would put significant pressure on this distinction—ironically, it seems, given capitalism's relentless drive to maximize productivity. One might have expected to see purposeful labor contrasted all the more forcefully against purposeless play, as

[27] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), 182, 197. Here Ngai deftly examines the cultural overlap between the *zanni* of sixteenth-century *commedia dell'arte* and the comic performers of post-Fordist American sitcom and film.

[28] Thomas Aquinas, from *Exposition de Hebdomadibus* and *Contra gentes*, in *St. Thomas Aquinas: Philosophical Texts*, ed. and trans. Thomas Gilby (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1982), 2, 264. Aristotle differentiates leisure or σχολή from play (παιδιά), privileging this form of nonwork and tethering it to the pursuit of philosophy.

indeed we come to find in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Smith proposes that all ephemeral activity (such as, in his example, a theatrical performance) is unproductive if it does not result in a vendible commodity. Smithian political economy has in general reified "productivity" this way by tethering it to whatever generates profit. However, as I've been arguing, the literature of emergent capitalism is registering something quite different: play is coming to be seen as purposeful, even productive, a kind of skill. Play, in other words, is taken into capitalism's totalizing logic. I have offered that such a phenomenon owes to capitalism's structural insistence not just on productivity but also on competition, an inherently ludic category. Even when the stakes are deadly serious, competition awakens the same set of affective responses we find in playful gaming: rivalry, desire (for victory, sometimes for one's rivals), theatricality or dissembling, a quickening of the self and its nervous energies. A structurally competitive domestic and, increasingly, globalizing economy began to demand the kinds of skills that games had always honed.

At the opening of this introduction I suggested that a festal or magic circle view of play has been the dominant model assumed in early modern readings of play and culture. I'll add to this that a mimetic view of play—of play not as festivity per se but as the imitation of more "serious" activity, the way a child might imitate their parents as an essential stage of their socialization—is also at the heart of Aristotle's definition of tragedy, "the imitation (*mimesis*) of an action." Without blaming all on Aristotle, this foundational insight has surely contributed to some of the difficulty of conceiving play as something other than a response to non-play, as derivative and secondary.

In early modern studies, the Shakespearean green world is an excellent example of what I mean by festal play, which is often also mimetic in character. In the Forest of Arden, or the fairy world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or even the island on which the entire conflict of *The*

Tempest is worked out, a special world offers release from, and finally clarification about, the normal, mundane world to which everyone eventually returns.[29] In the 1980s and '90s, these green worlds were taken into new historicism's fascination with institutional, stylized play—public drama, *commedia dell'arte*, charivari, carnival, holiday misrule, and the like—which, while less conservative than the green world and invested in play's potential for radical critique, still tended to cordon play off from the world beyond. For new historicism, the spatial and architectural confines of the playhouse, the district, and the city itself demarcated what counted as play and what did not. Confined to the suburban liberties, the districts beyond the jurisdiction of the City of London, licensed play comments on the world as an outsider looking in. Thus, "within the discursive order of Elizabethan culture," writes Louis Montrose, "drama was not classified as a *rite* but rather as *play*: it was a socially marginal activity, an entertainment offered for sale to anyone who could pay the relatively modest price of admission."[30] The time of performance, as Michael Bristol puts it, "is a festive time in which play and mimesis replace productive labor."[31] These understandings of play as a marginal activity with its own unique temporality has obviated some of the ways in which those same feelings, affects, dispositions, and gestures that constituted theatrical play had their representational appeal in large part because they were tapping into a cultural undercurrent that reached well beyond the institutional theater. Stephen Greenblatt's

[29] See Northrop Frye, "The Argument of Comedy," in *Shakespeare: Essays in Modern Criticism*, ed. Leonard F. Dean (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), 79-89; C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959); and Harry Berger, Jr., *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988).

[30] Louis A. Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 39, emphasis original. See also Stephen Mulvaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988). While attentive to the massive political, economic, and cultural importance of the institutional public theater in early modern urban life, these studies nonetheless read play as sanctioned within the space of this theater and thus as a mimicry of the life outside.

[31] Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 112.

Renaissance Self-Fashioning begins to approach this more reified view of play, which for Greenblatt regularly emerges as a vitalizing force *within* the representational world of the drama and not simply as a formal element of the theater. Nonetheless, this "absolute play," as he terms it in the chapter on Marlowe, is overwrought and in the end self-defeating, collapsing against the hard wall of power and dominant ideology.[32]

New historicism—and its British counterpart, cultural materialism—have, to be sure, been sharply attentive to the ways play speaks back to institutional power and vice versa. But this circuit also depends upon the assumption that the two are ultimately separate domains of sociocultural experience. Play must here be distinguished from theatricality, the technology of power with which the new historicists, drawing from Foucault, were intensively concerned. "Theatricality is not set over against power but is one of power's essential modes," as Greenblatt succinctly puts it.[33] Yet play, something deeper than theatricality—more primal, more spontaneous—was a problem for power, the thing that power, though itself highly theatrical, always needed to contain. Drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin's study of carnival subversion in *Rabelais and His World* (1965), this treatment of play culminated in the now largely stale subversion-containment debate, which asked whether popular culture, with its inversions and parodic laughter, successfully subverts official culture (as Bakhtin alleged), or whether official culture temporarily permits some forms of transgression as a safety-valve strategy of containing them.[34] This question, too, operates on the assumption that the world of play is radically distinct from the world of serious officialdom.

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[32] See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* [1980] (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 193-221.

[33] Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets," in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), 46.

[34] For significant contributions to the subversion-containment debate, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986); Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth*; Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets," in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 21-65; Jonathan Dollimore, "Shakespeare Understudies: The Sodomite, the Prostitute, the Transvestite, and Their Critics," in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism, Second Edition*, ed. Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1994), 129-52;

This festal or magic circle account of play—for all its political insight—nonetheless assumes a riven or fragmented subject for whom play is an intentional act of defiance against a temporal order that otherwise fades into the background when the time of playing has ended. An account of a more fully interpellated subject, constantly toggling between the dictates of play and work, will need to dispense with the notion that play is socially marginal or that it can be readily contrasted against the regimes of labor and productivity that structure capitalist life. In his landmark *Homo Ludens* (1938), Johan Huizinga offers a cultural account that brings play squarely into the center of human relations, and thus (to again show my cards) has been useful in informing my own analysis of what "play" comes to mean under capital. For Huizinga, human culture itself originated *sub specie ludi*, and play is thus so elemental that "human civilization has added no essential feature to the general idea of play."[35] It is an extravagant claim, a surely untenable claim if read straight, but it offers a seductive argument about the ways play spills over into language, myth and ritual, law, and almost every other cultural form. The analysis is largely philological and impressively transcultural, even if its tendencies toward a universalizing essentialism are woefully outdated. In its great survey of play and culture, *Homo Ludens* also rarely looks beyond the late Middle Ages and thus never fully engages the material and psychic conditions of capitalism. In fact, in the few places where the profit-motive appears, it is often figured as quashing the authentic spirit of play: real, playful competitiveness or *agon* is to be associated with the ancient Greek games at Olympia, not with the capitalist work-discipline that seeks only profit. Thus, as Brian Sutton-Smith summarizes, "only in archaic times is culture truly inspissated [for Huizinga] with

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Molly S. Smith, *Breaking Boundaries: Politics and Play in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); and, more recently, Jennifer C. Vaught, *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). For a historicist view of popular rebellion that centers festivity and the reactions against it, see David Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

[35] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Mansfield Centre: Martino Publishing, 2014), 1.

the playful use of contestive forms," since "modern professional forms of play…have been appropriated for the enrichment of the owners rather than existing as a display of virtue by the people."[36] And yet, in spite of its limitations, this foundational text of play theory can still speak to materially-oriented criticisms especially in the wake of the affective and cultural turns, even those for whom play is not a governing category of analysis.

In one development of these "turns," the new economic criticism (NEC), we more closely circle in on my reading of play as one of the primal energies of capitalist economic life. Cross-pollinating between economic and literary theory, the NEC critiques the neoclassical economic assumption of a rational economic actor whose movements through basically stable markets are guided by self-interest and deliberative choice. As Theodore Leinwand puts it, in early modernity "[t]here was no one, consistent, *homo economicus*."[37] Instead, desire, imagination, and the irrational are given their due for the ways they too motivate economic behavior.[38] These insights are relevant to my reading of play as not only a mimetic activity but also a profoundly creative one; through play, the subject invents new ways of being and new modes of inhabiting the body-in-action. I am defining play here in ways that resonate with Hannah Arendt's definition of the much broader category *action*, a form of natality (as she terms it) that entails "tak[ing] an initiative…to set something into motion" in new, agentic, and experimental ways.[39] My notion of bioeconomics is meant to extend the conceptual understanding of capitalism as being in part an imaginatively-produced entity, which is not to diverge from a historical-materialist analysis of real

[36] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), 79.
[37] Theodore Leinwand, *Theatre, Finance, and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 7.
[38] For more on this see the introduction to *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics*, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen (London: Routledge, 1999), 3-50.
[39] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), 177.

conditions but to suggest the extent to which fictive constructs undergird capitalist economic life.[40] I think a broad conceptual movement toward understanding play as an act of world-production *through* the resources of mimesis can help explain why it is that early capitalist modernity began to open up versions of productive play that had previously remained dormant, or didn't exist at all. New relations of production, new market pressures, and new forms of relationality were revealing just how quickly things could change, and how important imaginative agency could be in reimagining, or even constructing, the transition to something new.

NEC has also (if sporadically) engaged the play of eros in economic life through the work of French thinkers Georges Bataille, Jean-François Lyotard, and Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, each of whom advanced versions of what Lyotard terms "libidinal economy." Working in the wake of the May 1968 unrest, these thinkers made significant contributions to the questions of economy and affect that the NEC also takes up. In part as a continuation of the artistic-political manifestos of the Situationists, who called for a renewal of play amidst the deadening effects of urban capitalist alienation, they tended to see capitalism as reining in, reducing, or rationalizing the libidinal, which either threatens the system or simply resists its attempt at measuring whatever is not immediately instrumental to the needs of capital.[41] This unregisterable emotional or psychic excess thus becomes "an incommensurability…not captured by the accounting methods of

[40] Bradley Ryner notes, for example, that "economic thinking requires tools that are both material (such as account books and calculators) and rhetorical (such as metaphors for abstract concepts and narratives describing economic activity)" (*Performing Economic Thought: English Drama and Mercantile Writing, 1600-1642* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2014], 1). Brian Sheerin has suggested that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, English writers (pace King Lear) "were becoming acutely cognizant of how something actually could come from nothing" (*Desires of Credit in Early Modern Theory and Drama: Commerce, Poesy, and the Profitable Imagination* [London: Routledge, 2016], 1). In some ways these are extensions of Marc Shell's thesis that economic analysis itself must be understood as discursive in its frequent use of literary tropes like metaphor, homology, and isomorphism; see Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978); and *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982).

[41] On the Situations, see *The Situationists and the City: A Reader*, ed. Tom McDonough (London: Verso, 2010).

political economy," even though it haunts every act of exchange.[42] Bataille has examined forms of exchange that are interested not in production and accumulation but in spending, destruction, and waste, acts that spectacularly reaffirm the social power of the destroyer whose ability to part with great wealth displays superiority over a rival. Drawing from the anthropology of Marcel Mauss, Bataille identifies these energies in the northwestern Native American potlatch ceremony and thus with a distinctly non-capitalistic form of political economy. Such ostentatious expenditure was once practiced by the European aristocracy, Bataille points out, but the bourgeoisie identified itself against this extremity by keeping its expenditures private, enclosed, and hidden.[43] In Lyotard's more convoluted account, desire itself inherently resists systematization and libidinal investments thus regularly confound capitalism's attempts to contain them, even as organizational systems must be maintained as a necessary evil.

My own sense of what I will call mercantile eroticism approaches the question of capitalism and affect from quite the opposite direction. At least in early modernity when major economic transitions were acutely felt, the restructuring of financial relations, I argue, often unleashed new erotic energies and structured or consolidated new affective communities. My chapter on Shakespeare's queer mercantilism delves most rigorously into these new arrangements of desire, but they are also present in Marlowe and, in a perhaps quieter way, in Jonson. While my analyses of early modern texts will locate this energy in particular embodied actors, I want to reiterate that "erotic" has a wider scope for my study than what might be implied by discrete, isolatable, individuated acts of sexual contact. Rather, pointing to a more generalizable "feeling of play" as a cache of tropes from which early modern writers draw and a system of affects which

[42] Brian P. Cooper and Margueritte S. Murphy, "'Libidinal Economics': Lyotard and Accounting for the Unaccountable," in *The New Economic Criticism*, 231.
[43] See Georges Bataille's essay "The Notion of Expenditure," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), 116-29.

their literature produces, I mean to suggest that desire often surfaces from within circuits of political and economic relationality which, in the aggregate, structure what is thinkable but can also be bent and reshaped by the very desires they produce. Desire, in these contexts, is to be identified with a certain kind of possession that is also consonant with capitalism's labor-relations of service, slavery, and compelled work. These relations are in some ways a holdover from feudalistic labor arrangements but in other ways reflect the capitalistic repatterning of work as itinerant, variable, and, increasingly, a global trade commodity.

To analyze these circuits more closely, my discussions of desire and affect will draw less from psychoanalysis, tremendously fruitful though its methods are, and more from the history of literary representation: what do written texts from the period suggest about the ways desire is interpreted, constituted, and reconfigured in response to shifting economic circumstances? Asking the question at all permits an account of cultural *change* that hovers over any concepts-history like the one I am outlining here.

II. LET US PLAY

Before giving an overview of the chapters that follow, a brief word is necessary on why this book turns so prominently, though not exclusively, to drama. There is an obvious resonance between the "plays" of the public theater and the "play" I have been discussing, though there are also important distinctions. It is imperative that play, as it appears in the following chapters, not be conflated with early modern London's explosive entertainment industry of public playhouses, bearbaiting and cockfighting arenas, dicing and gambling venues, brothels, and the like, vital as

these are in England's transition to a consumerist economy.[44] The unique phenomenology of the theater, or what Walter Benjamin called its aura—its embodied actors always in dialogue with a live audience, the materiality of the stage and its *mise-en-scène* always in view—makes it a natural medium, to be sure, for working through the ambiguous crossovers of play and work that I'm identifying. The theater, then, was the place to literally stage the tension which characterized daily life in a mercantile or early capitalist economy, even if the institutional theater is not to be taken as fully synonymous with playing. But the transformation of play-acting into a financially viable craft is only one event in the larger story I want to tell. Through its play-actors, the early English theater reflects on play as a practice that had become meaningful to the lived experience of urban life. This practice includes mimetic theatricality, but it also channels this energy into something creative and productive. In its darker manifestations, such play is Machiavellian and manipulative; but it just as often resembles something closer to Arendtian natality, the affirmation of the self as something always utterly new. The English Renaissance theater was hugely improvisational, its plays interspersed with paratheatrical interludes, its audiences notoriously rowdy and often combative, and in this it reflects the *theatrum mundi* or theater of the world in quite dynamic ways. Early modern dramatists were using their own rich resources as purveyors of a self-reflective play culture to illuminate how play had already found its way into their relational life.

[44] For more on this entertainment industry in its urban capitalist economic context, see recent contributions by Gina Bloom*, Gaming the Stage: Playable Media and the Rise of English Commercial Theater* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2018); Matthew Hunter, "City Comedy, Public Style," *English Literary Renaissance* 46.3 (2016): 401-32; and Donald Hedrick, "Too Much Fun: Shakespeare's Entertainment Unconscious," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 45.2 (2012): 17-39; along with the edited volumes *Masculinity and the Metropolis of Vice, 1550-1650*, ed. Amanda Bailey and Roze Hentschell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and *The Culture of Capital: Property, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England*, ed. Henry S. Turner (New York: Routledge, 2002). See also Leinwand's *Theatre, Finance, and Society in Early Modern England*; and Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).

Nonetheless, while this book privileges theater, the three chapters on drama also include significant readings of poetry, in part to disentangle what I mean by "play" from the institutional playing practices of the public theater. Chapter 1, on More's *Utopia*, does not address drama at all, in part to establish a longer history of play that isn't equivalent with the cultural importance of the theater. And while the chapters follow a forward chronological timeline from More to Jonson, I do not mean to suggest by this any strict teleology in the ways play is figured by the literature of emergent capitalism. While this book stands upon the general claim that the transition from feudalism to capitalism wrought changes to material and conceptual formations of work and play, I seeing its authors approaching the cultural entanglements between these in different rather than developmental ways; they represent various aesthetic and ideological approaches rather than stages in an unfolding process. What all four have in common is that they write consciously for a market, some of the first in England to do so.[45] The context for More's writing is quite different than it will be for the later dramatists, but More's self-aware construction of an authorial persona is no less economically inflected. I have selected Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson because they were the most successful and prolific dramatists of their day, and while I do not believe that their canonicity lends them special authority, I am interested in how—as writers for a burgeoning market, and arbiters of that mysterious thing called "taste"—each of them had sincere investments (including monetarily) in capturing something of the spirit of lived relations. Put crudely: what representations of mercantile desire were most likely to sell in the early modern marketplace? The popularity of these writers attests to their apparent success at landing on an answer.

[45] For a robust account of how consumer demand shaped writing in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, see David J. Baker, *On Demand: Writing for the Market in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010). This work builds on Douglas Bruster's tracing of a "social mythology and poetics of nascent capitalism" that emerged from a theater that "was, *a priori*, a market" and thus "primarily a place of business" (*Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992], 11, 10).

Chapter 1 begins at the beginning with the earliest literary text we have ruminating at length on the practice of land enclosure: Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). It is no accident that this is also a resolutely playful text. Situating *Utopia* within the humanist rhetorical tradition of *serio ludere* or "serious play" that includes Nicholas of Cusa's *De ludo globi* (1463), the *Facetiae* of Poggio Bracciolini (1470), and Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1511), I argue that More's serious play is instrumentalized to meet the challenges of an emergent economy that paradoxically demands productivity even as it strips great swathes of its population from their traditional means of production. Yet while *Utopia*'s Book 1 is tremendously sensitive to the plight of this alienated population, Book 2's literary play is practiced in the service of promoting a strict regime of disciplinary labor for Utopia's inhabitants. Thus, there is a tension between the fecund playfulness of More's authorial persona, expressed in the literary play of the text itself, and the mechanisms of Utopian labor which, contrary to the assessments of most critics, leave the Utopians with little recreational time and meager opportunities to play. I attribute this tension to More's own ambiguous and potentially precarious class standing. I then turn to consider how the bodies of the text's Utopian workers are affectively constituted. *Utopia* tries to contain the erotic energies it finds in people at play and rechannel these into a proto-colonialist drive toward plantation, in direct contradiction to the island's communistic principles of non-ownership. It thus refracts a problem faced even in the earliest decades of the transition to capitalism about how to redirect—not merely contain—the erotic, playful, and "riotous" energies of a restive population.

Chapter 2 then shuttles forward to the Elizabethan public theater and to the overreaching protagonists of its dynamic early voice, Christopher Marlowe. The largely agricultural world of Thomas More has become the urban mercantile world of the late sixteenth century. This chapter centers on Marlowe's mercantile tragedy, *The Jew of Malta*, though its extended readings of

Marlowe's early stage success *Tamburlaine, Pt. 1* and of his only short lyric poem, "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love," are invested in the ways erotic energy circulates through the exchange of objects, commodities, and witty language play especially among social and political rivals. What I see happening in each of these texts is a process whereby the eroticization of work makes work into a version of play: not a play that is mimetic, recreational, or counterpoised against work, but a play that is itself productive in the ways that work is, a play that actually structures some form of political economy. Marlowe's rich and sometimes exasperating tragicomic tonality, especially pronounced in *Jew*, foregrounds this tension between the serious and the ludic, work and play. Whereas More's *Utopia* attempts to sublimate the erotic energies of play into the productive work of agricultural or guild labor and of foreign land plantation, Marlowe's dramaturgy is more affirmative of the ways that play, as an eroticized version of work, breaks through and reveals itself in the rhythms of systemic organizations of labor—not as a disorganizing force but as a part of capitalist rationality.

In Chapter 3 I see William Shakespeare extending this eroticized mercantilism into a more expressly queer mercantilism. In his Italian merchant comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare explores how risk, whether as financial wager or as courtship game, enters the domain of amatory relations where it destabilizes both traditional kinship ties and heterosexual linearity. I enlist a loosely-theorized form of relationality that I call "genderplay" to describe the playful rivalry between and among the sexes, for financial profit, that is the core structural element and affective drive of both plays. In *Shrew*, acts of risk challenge stable kinship networks but "prove" marital compatibility, however dubiously, when Petruchio's wager on Kate's behavior succeeds in turning a profit, so that the marital relation comes to resemble a corporation. In *Merchant*, as networks of risk expand and become more entangled, the affective relations

tethered to them also become entangled, resulting in the fecund queer imaginary of the play's final act. Engaging recent trends in queer temporality that have seen a renewed historicization of queerness, I go against the grain of prominent strands of queer theory that atemporally theorize the "queer" as the nonnormative, offering instead that the risky queering of traditional relations illuminates points of contact between the queer play of desire and the normative desire for financial gain. It thus becomes possible to identify interruptions to heterosexual reproductive futurity (in both these plays, the embracing of a marital future that could possibly go wrong), as well as a speculative queer futurity, in this period of increasingly entangled and risky financial relations.

Chapter 4 brings us, finally, to Ben Jonson, for whom the rhythms of capitalist play have become ripe for satire. Jonson's ambivalent fascination with London's criminal underground—the cheats, highwaymen, and cutpurses that populated an entire genre of so-called cony-catching literature—prompts his figuring of risk not just as a feature of mercantile trade but also of the law. Scam, as Jonson's city comedies foreground, is a double-edged sword: the greater the opportunity for profit, the more vulnerable to legal punishment the scammer becomes. But Jacobean law was only just beginning to figure out how to adjudicate cases of fraud, opening an opportunistic space for the scammer to twist through the contorted gaps between financial gain and punitive legal action. I focus my attention on two of Jonson's most mature city comedies: *Volpone* (1606), where the Venetian law finally succeeds in capturing and punishing the law's transgressors, and *The Alchemist* (1610), where the law is an everpresent threat that nonetheless proves weak and ineffective in the play's final act. Through these vagaries of legal (non)retribution, I reconsider the con/dupe dyad that has come to be taken as a self-evident feature of the urban relations in Jonsonian city comedy, proposing instead that in Jonson's satirical picture of risky monetary relations, con and dupe alike are subject to vulnerability, punishment, and loss. Further, the city

comedy's interest in *self*-deception (voiced by con and gull alike) points to the rise of an increasingly fractured and alienated self whose precarious play in a volatile economy threatens always to perform its own undoing.

Today, as corporations small, medium, and large promise "fun" work environments and enlist the language of friendship and family to characterize their relational culture, the awkward waltz between play and work, seriousness and levity, drudgery and pleasure, persists. In a brief afterword, I will turn to the Frankfurt School and to more recent theorizations of capitalism and affect to consider how the early modern relations I describe persist into twentieth- and twenty-first-century capitalism. As Fordist industrial capitalism morphs into the innovative tech capitalism of our own century, I think we will continue to see a vigorous reenergizing of the play-that-is-work and work-that-is-play that marked even the early emergence of capitalist modernity in England.

CHAPTER 1

"That no man sit idle": More's *Utopia* and the Problem of Play

"I've been working, oh I've been working
But I still got a long way to go."
—Pat Lundy, "Work Song"

Thomas More's *Utopia* has a problem with play. In saying this, I do not mean to align myself with the camp of "antiutopians" in whom Philip Abbott locates a critique of utopia as overtly "firm and dogmatic," "obsessed with management," and "preoccupied with ends and indifferent to means," rigorously rejecting all "[a]ctivity that is enjoyable…spontaneous, and voluntary."[1] While Utopia is thoroughly bureaucratic—"centrally concerned," as Amy Boesky puts it, "with organization, with new institutions, and with institutionalism"—early modern readers did not, for that, find it a dull or unhappy place, as the puns on utopia/eutopia ("good place") that proliferate in utopian writing suggest.[2] Nor do I mean to push against the critical understanding, transmitted especially among Marxist interpreters, of utopian literary form as a *jeu d'espace*, a space of play where the internal contradictions of history and its social reproductions are reified in the ambiguous textual apparatus itself. Nonetheless, my reading notes a salient tension between the playful form of *Utopia* and the mandate of compulsory work that structures life in the Utopian polity it describes. As Book I makes clear, *Utopia* is acutely aware of the social problems that attend widespread unemployment in More's contemporary England, and it attempts to remedy this in Book II by imagining a commonwealth where a regime of full employment results in absolute

[1] Philip Abbott, "Utopians at Play," *Utopian Studies* 15.1 (2004): 44.
[2] Amy Boesky, *Founding Fictions: Utopias in Early Modern England* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1996), 15.

productivity. Yet *Utopia*'s Lucianic irony, expressed particularly in its nomenclature of self-effacement (Utopia itself means "Nowhere"), cues its readers to understand the book itself as an object of play, even as a kind of toy.[3] Puns, paradoxes, litotes, and a bevy of paratextual materials (including maps, a Utopian alphabet, and letters between celebrity humanists) mark the text, in their accretions and interactivity, as a kind of humanist game. Why, then, to put it simply, is a text so preoccupied with finding the best system of organized labor so *playful* in form—so playful, in fact, that it risks ambiguous irresolution about its own conclusions on the best state of a commonwealth (*de optimo rei publicae statu*)?

As humanism's rhetorical mode of *serio ludere* or "serious play" indicates, literary play is not aimless or frivolous; its object is the formulation and transmission of ideas. David Norbrook situates More within a tradition of "radical humanism" that understands "political and rhetorical experimentation [as] closely associated," such that the "recurrent verbal games and rhetorical paradoxes in the *Utopia* are not opposed to the political satire but are integral parts of the process of undermining older forms of political discourse."[4] The astonishing inventiveness of More's *Utopia* as a political project is facilitated by its inventiveness with language, its penchant for playing wordgames indexing an analogous ability to play with ideas. On the question of narrative play as *jeu d'espace*, Louis Marin argues that "utopia masks and reveals the fundamental conflicts in ideology between developing productive forces and social conditions of production….But utopia performs this masking *diversely*; it works at multiple levels….It is at work in the fiction and

[3] Here I have in mind Jeffrey Knapp's discussion of trifles as the means through which, following Sir Philip Sidney, "poetry alone can elevate its lowly, even savage auditors because poetry alone looks commensurately, and therefore invitingly, too low" (*An Empire Nowhere: England, America, and Literature from Utopia to The Tempest* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992], 6). English literary output justifies itself as sublime not in spite of being a trifle, but because of it, through a kind of humility topos in which "little England" (5) achieves political and colonial mastery "only through the medium of toys" (6), objects which are also offered to the native Americans in an effort to pacify and subdue them. I elaborate an argument about *Utopia*'s colonialist project later in the piece, but I include here Knapp's observation that More, "outside his fiction, mocks his own work as an unworldly trifle" (8).

[4] David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 19.

gives it *play*."[5] Here, rather than confidently undermining a prevailing discourse, *Utopia* plays in tension with itself, both masking and revealing "at multiple levels" the conflicts that produced it in the first place. Yet More's games are only intelligible to an audience literate in Latin and Greek, a quite small readerly coterie whose access to the text comes at the exclusion of most others.[6] This observation, while nothing new, is one that I want to foreground as I think about how class politics, the particular agencies of differently-classed bodies especially in the historic transition from feudalism to capitalism, complicate the radical play of this curious text. For whom is radical play actually available, and to what objectives does it answer?

To begin, I note that my characterization of the Utopian labor law as a "mandate of compulsory work" may strike some as ungenerous. As Morus's guide Raphael Hythloday (from Greek ὕθλος, "nonsense, idle talk") declares, the Utopians work only six hours per day and have manifold forms of recreation available to them once their daily work has been accomplished. Critics, even those who tend to focus on *Utopia*'s dystopianism, have largely replicated this optimistic view of Utopian work: light enough to allow for "more leisure" and "the pursuit of innocent pleasures," the Utopian labor law "provides all citizens with opportunities for self-cultivation."[7] Indeed, in Utopia "[t]he structure of everyday life reduces work to a minimum, leaving citizens free to attend lectures, to play games, or to improve roads, bridges, and other public resources."[8] Scratch the surface, however, and most Utopians work quite a bit longer than

[5] Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play [Utopiques: Jeux d'espaces]*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press Inc., 1984), 9, emphasis original.
[6] See Boesky for the argument that More modeled his *Utopia* on the establishment in 1509, by More's friend John Colet, of a school in St. Paul's Churchyard for educating the sons of London citizens. Pedagogical training, central to Utopian life, might be read in a democratic vein as expressing a wish for English readers to have like access to *Utopia*'s textual instruction.
[7] Alistair Fox, *Utopia: An Elusive Vision* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 45; Dominic Baker-Smith, *More's Utopia* (London: HarperCollins*Academic*, 1991), 163.
[8] Henry S. Turner, *The Corporate Commonwealth: Pluralism and Political Fictions in England, 1516-1651* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016), 7-8.

the six-hour workday Hythloday initially describes; their recreation, oriented at the distillation of moral values, often looks more like schooling than play; an underclass of enslaved criminals props up the whole system; and, in sum, the labor law itself assumes a body that is naturally predisposed to idleness and in need of the kind of regimented discipline that work ostensibly provides. This last observation is familiar to Foucauldian readings, but to my knowledge there has not been sustained engagement with the rather variegated and sometimes contradictory logics of work and play that produce the uniquely utopian body, a body predisposed to idleness yet also robust and eager to labor—likely because the text renders these logics deceptively simple by segmenting work from leisure time, and by rhetorically masking how little of the latter the Utopians actually have.

What I suggest, then, is that in *Utopia* the humanist embrace of playful ambiguity sits in tension with a utopian discourse whose imperative toward maximized productivity depends upon the total elimination of idle play. I locate this ideological tension, as a long tradition of Marxist criticism has, in the upheavals of England's economic transition. This transition was producing new conditions of idleness by fashioning a vagrant class of people removed, through practices of enclosure, from manorial land and from their traditional means of production, unlocatable territorially and socially and largely identified by the Tudor state as the cause rather than the consequence of social, political, and economic unrest. More's *Utopia* is sympathetic to the plight of this vagrant class in Book I, emphasizing the injustice of capital punishment for vagrant thieves who "go about and work not, whom no man will set a-work, though they never so willingly proffer themselves thereto" (102), while also condemning the idleness of the aristocracy as a moral failing and a signature of its decadence and ostentation.[9] In Book II it remedies this English problem by imagining an island society that has successfully eliminated unemployment. The actual practices

[9] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of the text come from *Utopia by Sir Thomas More*, trans. Ralph Robynson [1556], ed. David Harris Sacks (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999).

through which full employment is realized, however—including restrictions on travel, strong surveillance at the sites of work, and punishment of crime through slavery—speak to Norbrook's observation that *Utopia* "owes its speculative communism more to a negative desire to discipline the lower orders than to a positive sense of common humanity."[10] They are also uncannily mirrored in many of the later institutions of colonial labor in Ireland and America.

As for the question of play, it seems of no small importance that the recreational activities available to the Utopians are always pedagogic in their intent, suggesting a pervasive ideological apparatus that redirects even nominally free time toward the imperatives of productivity. I repeat here something akin to Michael Holquist's remark that the favorite Utopian game pitting vices against virtues "is not only a game in *Utopia*" but rather "the game *of* utopia."[11] Everything, that is, in Utopian life is oriented toward the achievement of "totality, order, [and] perfection," those "cardinal characteristics of the utopian form" that share with games a regulatory logic and an interest in imposing structure over freeplay.[12] None of this is odd or surprising, really, until one remembers that More and his circle are themselves playing a game, while the subjects he describes are forbidden anything like the degree of diversional liberty that worked to produce the text of *Utopia* itself. The disjunction, I argue, reflects an important shift in the ways play and work were conceived and represented under early regimes of capital production. As I will show, Books I and II adopt radically inverse attitudes toward both the working body and the body at play, reflecting the contestability of such bodies in the moments of capital's early inception.

[10] Norbrook, 11.
[11] Michael Holquist, "How to Play Utopia," *Yale French Studies* 41 (1968): 109, emphasis original.
[12] J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 38.

Productivity is not, of course, the exclusive or only interest of a capitalist economic structure, but it is a uniquely important component. As Henry Heller outlines, "Capital existed under feudalism as it did in the slave mode of production," namely as merchant and financial capital available as credit, but was only "felt at the level of exchange relations" and "did not enter into the sphere of production."[13] Its entrance into this sphere signals the birth pangs of a transition from a feudalistic to a capitalistic economy.[14] Further, a confluence of historical changes over the course of the English sixteenth century, including land enclosure, urbanization, and intensifying political authoritarianism and bureaucratic centralization, puts a certain premium on productive labor organization. In such a context, idleness looms as particularly threatening and destabilizing. If medieval sermons against idleness tended to condemn idleness as a moral failing, more or less synonymous with the sin of sloth, *Utopia* reflects an emergent moment when a characteristically capitalist mode of productivity tied to wage labor reconstitutes idleness as a political threat tied to a class body. This becomes clear in the text's uneven treatment of different idling "types." *Utopia* laughs at courtly and monastic forms of idleness—making the idle friar at the Cardinal's table the butt of a joke in Book I, and mocking the ostentatious Anemolian ambassadors in Book II—but it polices and punishes the nonworking bodies of its Utopian citizens, quick to associate this form of nonproductivity with riot and sedition. Not all forms of play, it would seem, are created equal; thus

[13] Henry Heller, *The Birth of Capitalism: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 12.
[14] For more on the transition debate, see Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1946); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, Vol. 1: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, Vol. 2: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy* (New York: Academic Press, 1980); *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, ed. Rodney Hilton (London: New Left Books, 1976); *Du féodalisme au capitalisme: problèmes de la transition*, ed. Dobb and Paul Sweezy, trans. Florence Gauthier and Françoise Murray, 2 vol. (Paris: Maspero, 1977); Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," *New Left Review* 104 (1977): 25-93; and Brenner, "Dobb on the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 2.2 (1978): 121-40. Heller provides a concise overview and critique of this formative body of work, noting its Anglo- and Eurocentrism and relative lack of attention to the importance of state intervention.

the Utopian polity's need for games of clear moral instruction, even as *Utopia* the humanist game leaves its own conclusions on the best state of a commonwealth playfully suspended.

Most Marxist critics have thus tended to read *Utopia* more or less as the projection of a class wish. Raymond Williams characterized the polity as a "small-owner republic, with laws to regulate and protect but also to compel labour," drawn from the "social experience" of an upper peasantry that had enjoyed some freedom in the breakdown of feudalism but was soon exploited by the great landowners who had profited from the wool trade.[15] Christopher Kendrick, while he accuses Williams's assessment of harboring its own class wish for a communistic middle class when "what is involved [for More] is a sense of the patent absurdity of middle-class communism," seems to have argued something similar in his own earlier discussion of the subject, proposing that *Utopia* "speaks for the paradigmatic late feudal subject in redressing the peculiarly relativized situation of the English social formation."[16] Frederic Jameson's proposal at the end of *The Political Unconscious*—that "[a]ll class consciousness of whatever type is Utopian insofar is it expresses the unity of a collectivity"—similarly identifies utopia with class cohesion and a structure of feeling marked by the continuity of shared desire.[17] In distinction, while I read *Utopia* as a paradigmatically transitional text, I emphasize the disparities rather than continuities between the productivity of More the humanist author, ironically enabled by play, and the productivity of *Utopia*'s imagined citizens, characterized by the concerted dismantling of play. Utopia certainly seems designed for the success and happiness of people like More, but this does not mean that the Morean subject is the only or even the exemplary subject of that polity.

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[15] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 44.
[16] Christopher Kendrick, *Utopia, Carnival, and Commonwealth in Renaissance England* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2004), 71; "More's *Utopia* and Uneven Development," *boundary 2* 13.2/3 (1985): 249.
[17] Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 290-91.

Rather than locating a paradigmatic late feudal subject, what I find in *Utopia*'s attempt to place the unplaceable (if, ironically, into Nowhere) is an imaginative grappling with social, political, and economic *difference*, reified in the radical partitioning of *Utopia*'s playful form from its "serious" program of reform. The split suggests a revisioning of play as the domain or property of a certain class of producers—the author, as the first part of my argument will show—whose play is not merely unthreatening to productivity but indeed an instrument of it. The vagrant classes of Book I are brought to idleness through no fault of their own, but their play—in the form of "stews, wine taverns, alehouses, and tippling houses, with so many naughty, lewd, and unlawful games as dice, cards, tables, tennis, bowls, [and] quoits"—is inherently antiproductive and unruly (notice the easy slippage from "naughty" to "unlawful"), and sends them "straight a-stealing when their money is gone" (104).[18] Though it displaces these vagrant classes into Nowhere, their ghostly, residual presence survives in Utopia's apparatuses of control which imply the constant threat of their reemergence. What I see, then, is not a class wish abstracted into the playful fantasy of the utopian narrative, but an urgent identification of capital's fashioning of an idle vagrant class and an anxious defense of the author as a good subject whose play ought to be acknowledged, within this transitional order, as a legitimate form of productive work.

Sarah Hogan identifies a tripartite "historical conflict among mercantilist interests, monarchical dictates, and the agrarian commoner's situation" that marks the ascendency of capital and informs Book I's discussion of enclosure and vagrancy.[19] It is difficult to align More with any

[18] In this there are strong echoes from the opening of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*: "In Flandres whilom was a compaignye / Of yonge folk that haunteden folye— / As riot, hasard, stewes, and tavernes, / Wher as with harpes, lutes, and giternes / They daunce and playen at dees [dice] bothe day and night" (*The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 10th ed., vol. A, ed. George M. Logan, Deidre Shauna Lynch, et. al. [New York: Norton, 2018], 333, lines 175-79). The medieval echo reminds us of the persistence of moral condemnations of sloth in this emergent capitalist period.

[19] Sarah Hogan, *Other Englands: Utopia, Capital, and Empire in an Age of Transition* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2018), 40.

of these—in some ways, he belongs to all three—which is in part why I read utopian narrative form as a reification of the conflict itself rather than as an expression of a class solidarity.[20] Rather, as I have suggested, More is intensely interested in the question of what (and who) counts as productive in the emergent capitalistic order, as his important prefatory letter to Peter Giles shows. I begin with an analysis of this letter's entwined logics of work and play before considering how these refract (often much more unforgivingly) into the commonwealth of Utopia itself, where productive humanist play is simplified into a labor mandate. I propose that a phenomenology of the robust working body is essential to *Utopia* in order, ultimately, to construct the ideal colonizing agent, a perhaps surprising move at a time (1516) when England had limited imperial ambitions and no overseas colonies, though it was only two decades away from its first full conquest and colonization of Ireland.[21] In some anticipation of John Locke's labor theory of property, the Utopian body is made legible through its productivity, which extends into a colonialist logic of land acquisition from neighboring peoples who have left their land unworked and "unoccupied" (142). As Jeffrey Knapp points out, "the first references to the New World printed in England occur not in economic, political, or even geographical tracts but in imaginative literature, and then in association with idleness and folly."[22] From the start, the New World was imagined as a place where people play too much, necessitating violent intervention by those who know how to productively work the land others have left uncultivated. If Utopia's full employment is a corrective to the idleness of England's vagrant classes, made vagrant through forcible removal

[20] As Hogan summarizes, the canonical Marxist readings of *Utopia* "highlight the spatial play of islands as a 'neutralization' of sociohistorical contradictions—as opposed to an ideological resolution of them" (6-7). While I also read "spatial play" in terms of a reification of historical contradiction, I note *Utopia*'s participatory tendency (though a latent one) to model a form of spatial play that will be productive to a transitional order that is reshaping what it means to be productive to begin with.

[21] Here it may be important to note that More's brother-in-law, John Rastell, attempted to found a colony in America just one year after *Utopia*'s first printing. See Knapp, 21.

[22] Knapp, 20.

from their commons, *Utopia* recommends its own forced removal of idle subjects in an imagined New World as corrective to their ill land management. Without suggesting that *Utopia* is an explicit program for New World colonization, I hold that its conception of the body is almost undifferentiable from that of the colonialist imaginary and remains one of our best literary-textual examples of the inseparability of colonialism and early capitalism, which were not only structurally entwined with each other but also with an emerging discourse of the body as a site where idleness and industry remained always in contest.

I. "ALMOST NOTHING LEFT FOR ME TO DO": OR, HOW TO BELABOR PLAY

In 1515 Thomas More was sent by the English crown on an ambassadorial mission to the Low Countries; by 1516 he had completed a fictionalized account of his travels, with the elaborate report of an island described to him by a wizened Portuguese traveler he had met in Antwerp, Raphael Hythloday, who had accompanied Amerigo Vespucci on four of his voyages to the New World. Writing to his fellow humanist and magistrate of Antwerp, Peter Giles, More prefaces the two books of his *Utopia* by locating his reader *in media res* of a literary game:

> I am almost ashamed, right well-beloved Peter Giles, to send unto you this book of the Utopian commonwealth well nigh after a year's space, which I am sure you looked for within a month and a half. And no marvel. For you knew well enough that I was already disburdened of all the labor and study belonging to the invention of this work, and that I had no need at all to trouble my brains about the disposition or conveyance of the matter, and therefore had herein nothing else to do, but only to rehearse those things which you and I together heard Master Raphael tell and

> declare….And my writing, the nigher it should approach to his homely, plain, and simple speech, so much the nigher should it go to the truth, which is the only mark whereunto I do and ought to direct all my travail and study herein. I grant and confess, friend Peter, myself discharged of so much labor, having all these things ready done to my hand, that almost there was nothing left for me to do[.] (83-84)

More goes on to describe the various obligations, chiefly his lawyerly employments and the affective labors of domestic life, that have kept him from completing the text as quickly as he would have liked. His anxiety about the sluggishness of textual production is cast as all the more inexcusable because it demanded little creative labor; more stenographer than author, More had only to jot down what Hythloday had already spoken. Yet, however credibly autobiographical this narrative of vocational and affective labor as impediment to writing, More's disavowal of the writing itself as neither laborious nor his own invention must, of course, be understood within the playful framework of the text. By displacing all rhetorical labor onto the fictional Hythloday, More ironically attracts attention to the substantial labor that has gone into producing *Utopia*—whose composition justifiably demanded a full year, not a mere "month and a half." Humorous play, the letter's mood of winking irony, is the mechanism by which More ensures that his creative invention receives its just due.

Four decades later, Ralph Robynson's 1556 preface to the reader that accompanies his second translation of the work into English would take up a similar issue by indexing the work of composition through the conceit of the game. Robynson insists that his original 1551 translation was never meant to see the light of publication, having been rendered only for a close friend with limited Latin: "Lightly, therefore, I overran the whole work," he explains, "and in short time, with more haste than good speed, I brought it to an end" (82). As concerned as More with the timeliness

of textual production, Robynson is however not too slow but too quick; and "the hasty bitch bringeth forth blind whelps," he admits of this initial translation (82). Yet he comforts himself, he says, "with this notable saying of Terence: *Ita vita est hominum, quasi quum ludas tesseris* [The life of man is as if playing with dice]….Meaning therein, if that chance rise not which is most for the player's advantage, that then the chance, which fortune hath sent, ought so cunningly to be played, as may be to the player least damage" (82-83). The more considered 1556 translation will correct the faults of the earlier endeavor. The gaming conceit here is awkward and inexact, relying on the figuration of Robynson's 1551 project as "chance" sent by "fortune"; but by casting himself as a "cunning[]…player," and his work as "my game" (83), he preserves the Morean spirit of humanist play that frames the original Latin text. This was likely a conscious decision: most other vernacular editions of *Utopia* remove many if not all of its paratextual materials in order to emphasize *Utopia*'s utility to political philosophy. The title page of the earliest Dutch edition (Antwerp, 1553), for example, avers that the book will be of greatest profit to those "who in the present day have to rule a town and district, a purpose which it is above all suited to serve."[23] No gaming or dicing here—only the serious work of political rule.

In this way, More as author and Robynson as translator each advance a model of the humanist game by using the framework of play to reflect on their agency as creative laborers. Here I want to suggest that the framing devices of the English edition—the Giles letter and translator's preface—cue the reader to the text's concern with imaging laboring bodies by putting the labor of the author himself at stake. When More apologizes for his tardiness by playfully denying his own authorial agency, he really underlines his own sovereignty over the text; and when Robynson

[23] For more on this see Ronny Spaans and Terence Cave, "The Dutch Translation: Austerity and Pragmatism," in *Thomas More's Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts*, ed. Cave (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2008), 105.

apologizes for the imperfections of his 1551 translation by figuring them in the language of chance, he ironically accents this same writerly sovereignty. Such apologies are a variation, certainly, of the humility topos ubiquitous in early modern letters to patrons and other readers; but here, indexed through the category of the game, they read also as moments of agentic self-assertion.

By figuring labor itself as play, and their own work as a game, both More and Robynson arrogate to themselves the liberty to play with the logic of textuality itself. What emerges is the intentional self-construction of the author/translator as a unique subject whose work is defined by the special agency afforded by play. More and Robynson both adopt a persona that "give[s] the impression of needing to labor excessively hard to produce our laughter," as Sianne Ngai characterizes the emerging work of precarious and itinerant laborers.[24] Or, if not our laughter, at least our amusement: More is an actor who asks Giles to pity him as an overburdened worker, but who, in so doing, plays in a way that metonymizes a different kind of work—that of authorship. Lest this point become lost, More sees to it that his authorship, at first inflected through ironic self-displacement, is on terra firma by the end of his letter: "[S]eeing I have taken great pains and labor in writing this matter, if it may stand with his [Hythloday's] mind and pleasure, I will, as touching the edition or publishing of the book, follow the counsel and advice of my friends, and especially yours," he tells Giles (88). More's initial denial of textual labor ("almost there was nothing left for me to do") is here stood on its head ("I have taken great pains and labor in writing"), closing the letter's playful argument: having ironically underscored his creative labor by displacing it onto Hythloday, a fictional persona, More now urges the real act of publication that such labor merits. And the fictional persona, now partially obscured behind a "his," is playfully gestured toward but no longer essential to the argument.

[24] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), 10.

Though the letter to Giles makes such questions about authorial agency endemic to the text, they enjoyed a relatively short shelf life. A generation later, though the humanist coterie framework had not been lost, it had been significantly obscured. *Utopia* the literary game was becoming *Utopia* the political manual. The title page of Ortensio Lando's Italian translation (Venice, 1548) calls the work "*utile*" and "*necessario*"; removes all paratextual materials except for the Giles letter; and renames the text *Eutopia*, suggesting its real-world viability by removing the ambiguity of its placelessness (*Outopos*, No-Place).[25] Even Robynson the dice-player, by dedicating his first English edition to William Cecil, at that time Secretary of State to the young king Edward VI, seems to have understood the work as practicable to political philosophy.[26] And even as early as 1535, the Spanish bishop and judge Vasco de Quiroga was writing to Charles V from Michoacán to ask whether a Utopia-style polity might be instituted in Mexico.[27]

It may be tempting to argue that these translations into European vernaculars are in some way responsible for the more conceptual translation from game to political manual that seems to have taken place between the 1510s and '30s; at first in the hands of highly learned humanist players, the text eventually opens to a wider audience of literate political actors. Such an opening of the text is precisely what More feared, as his queasiness about English translation of his work in his *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532-33) attests.[28] But even the earliest Latin editions had

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[25] See Kristin Gjerpe, "The Italian *Utopia* of Lando, Doni and Sansovino: Paradox and Politics," in Cave (ed.), 50. This renaming is not without precedent; a verse allegedly written by Anemolius, Poet Laureate of Utopia and nephew of Hythloday, and included in the earliest Latin editions, has the personified island affirm that "*Eutopia merito sum uocanda nomine*" ("Deservedly ought I to be called by the name of Eutopia or Happy Land") (from *The Yale Edition* [vol. 4], 20-21).

[26] See Cave, "The English Translation: Thinking About the Commonwealth," in Cave (ed.), 87. The dedication to a person of such stature further troubles Robynson's claim in his 1556 preface that the translation of 1551 was undertaken only for one friend and published "partly against [Robynson's] will" (Sacks, 82).

[27] I have paraphrased here from Randi Lise Davenport and Carlos F. Cabanillas Cárdenas, "The Spanish Translations: Humanism and Politics," in Cave (ed.), 111. For more on de Quiroga and his implementation of two *hospital pueblos* in Mexico modeled in many ways on *Utopia*, see James Holstun, *A Rational Millennium: Puritan Utopias of Seventeenth-Century England and America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 6-7.

[28] Only one vernacular translation, the German edition of Basel 1524, appears to have been printed in More's lifetime, though a Spanish manuscript translation was also being circulated as early as 1519.

wrestled with the question of the seriousness and purpose of the work. While the original edition of 1516 describes itself, in good Horatian fashion, as a *libellus* (little book) that is *festivus* but also *salutaris* (beneficial, helpful), the second Latin edition excises *festivus* completely, dubbing the text an *opusculum* (little work) that is *utile* and *elegans*. To be sure, *libellus* is often used of nonfictional treatises, just as the diminutive form of *opus* evokes a feeling of play, so that neither of these earliest editions fully excises the play or work element. But the removal of *festivus* from the second edition, with the substitution of *liber* for *opus*, imparts a much stronger sense of gravitas—the text is pleasing, perhaps, for its style and grace, but loses much of the playful levity of the first edition. The movement into the *opus* of political philosophy is therefore not a later vernacular invention, but is in fact foregrounded on the Latin 1517 title page.

I call attention to these shifts in emphasis not only to complicate what I mean by "game," but also to propose that the distinction game/nongame raises a crucial question about agency. Even as More and Robynson construct an authorial persona through the conceit of the player, a governing concern of *Utopia* is to actually eliminate those forms of play which, in More's view, tend toward unlawfulness and sedition. This is the play of the idler and vagabond, those subjects treated by Hythloday with such clemency in Book I only to be virtually eradicated in Book II. If More and Robynson, sovereigns over their respective texts, arrogate to themselves the liberty to play by blurring the logics of play and work, the citizens of Utopia are bound to a labor mandate designed to curtail their liberty, restrict their movement, and delimit their recreation. Robynson may style himself a Terentian dice-player, but in Utopia "dice-play and such other foolish and pernicious games" are forbidden (137).

Further, More's pledge in his *Confutacion of Tyndale* to burn any English editions of his work or Erasmus's exposes something about the fragility of the humanist game he plays. *Utopia*'s

unavailability to translation, its refusal of displacement into another language, sits uneasily with its porousness as an object of ongoing modification, reprinting, and annotation by those in More's humanist in-group. His *Utopia*, therefore, games its politics: suspending many of its conclusions on the best state of a commonwealth, it also guards ambiguity itself for the coterie of players who have special access to the literary game, and, therefore, special agency to play with heterodox ideas. But for More, "euyll folke" with "theyr owne fonde fantasyes" cannot be similarly entrusted:

> I saye therfore in these dayes in whyche men by theyr owne defaute mysseconstre and take harme of the very scrypture of god, vntyll menne better amende, yf any man wolde now translate Moria [Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*] in to Englyshe, or some workes eyther that I haue my selfe wryten ere this, all be yt there be none harme therin…I wolde not onely my derlynges bokes but myne owne also, helpe to burne them both wyth myne owne handes, rather then folke sholde (though thorow theyr owne faute) take any harme of them, seynge that I se them lykely in these dayes so to do.[29]

More's textual sovereignty extends even to guardianship over possible misreadings of his work. His ire toward those unable to distinguish between "harme" and "good" suggests that, for all its seemingly intentional ambiguity, *Utopia* is meant to be legible in some ways and not in others. Hythloday's "homely, plain, and simple speech," which More says he had only to jot down, thus reveals itself again (this time in the much less playful realm of theological debate) as More's own painstaking rhetorical work: if the text really was a plain transcript, More's worry about

[29] From "The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer," in *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Vol. 8,* ed. Louis A. Schuster, Richard C. Marius, James P. Lusardi, and Richard J. Schoeck (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), 179.

vernacular misinterpretation would be overblown. But where, for More, such work is agentic and affirming, for the working bodies in his Utopia—as for his own imagined vernacular readership—it is proscribing and delimiting.

II. AN UNEVEN MATCH

We move, then, from the paratextual to the textual, from the playful working bodies of More and Robynson to the more circumscribed work of the Utopians. More asks Giles to imagine him at work so that he can more effectively counterpoise his own creative agency, his play that is really work, against the bad agency of the idler and vagrant. Before the erasure of the vagrant classes can be accomplished in Book II, however, Book I must identify idleness and vagrancy as the great social ills of More's England.

The discourses around labor, leisure, and unemployment that are the major concern of Book I are not peculiar to the English sixteenth century but have been elemental to Western cultural life. In classical antiquity, Greek σχόλη and Latin *otium* each denoted a kind of productive leisure, available only to men of status, which facilitated retirement from public affairs into the pursuits of art, philosophy, personal study, or tutoring—Cicero's *cum dignitate otium*. Against this stood *negotium* (non-leisure), the domain of business, politics, and worldly affairs. *Otium* ought not to be enjoyed at the expense of *officium* (duty), and could be in danger of sliding into *inertia* or idleness, and yet was also associated with *tranquilitas* and, in its martial context, with *pax* or peace. And then there was *otium negotiosum*, that lexically paradoxical "non-leisure in leisure" that at first signified periods of downtime during war but later came to denote productive retirement, leisure time spent cultivating the faculties of the mind. Though they adopted different shades of

meaning over time and between diverse authors, *otium* and *negotium* formed part of a cultural matrix always sutured to concerns around class, ethics, and the body.

While the medieval period enjoyed its colorful folk and liturgical festivals, its carnivals, its Feasts of Fools, it could also be suspicious of *otium*'s potential descent into *ignavia* (slothfulness), drawing from the fourth-century monk Evagrius's list of eight evil thoughts (here, 'ακηδία signifies something closer to apathy, or failure to perform one's worldly duties, than to slothfulness per se, but in any case Evagrius considers this the worst of the evil thoughts—and Spenser will place Idleness at the head of the train of seven deadly sins in Book 1, canto 4 of the *Faerie Queene*). Those thought most in danger of succumbing to sloth were the monastics, who had embraced holy poverty and mendicancy as a vocation, though their solitary and communal forms of prayer, contemplation, and recitation of the divine office did have some of the regimentation associated with *negotium*. In whatever estate, "[t]he key point," as Gregory Sadlek puts it, "is that the state of keeping busy was in itself the remedy [to idleness], and, until the later Middle Ages, concerns about labour *productivity* were kept to a minimum."[30] The crucial turning-point arrived in the mid-fourteenth century, when, in the wake of the Black Death which decimated the labor pool, a formerly affirmative valuation of solitude and rest was supplanted by a valorization of labor and rejection of ingrained notions of holy poverty. A.L. Beier points to what he terms the "de-sanctification of the poor," a process whose origins he locates a century earlier in canon law, as in part responsible for the intensifying crackdown on vagrants three centuries later under King Henry VIII.[31]

[30] Gregory Sadlek, "*Otium*, *Negotium*, and the Fear of *Acedia* in the Writings of England's Late Medieval Ricardian Poets," in *Idleness, Indolence, and Leisure in English Literature*, ed. Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 24.
[31] A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), 4.

Inheriting these classical and medieval discourses around work and leisure, which are only very broadly sketched here, Book I's debate about vagrancy eddies around both structural and affective explanations of poverty and unemployment, with Hythloday aligned with the former and the unnamed layperson at the Cardinal's table with the latter. When the layperson suggests unemployment in England is a function of indisposition to work—"There be handicrafts, there is husbandry to get their living by, if they would not willing be naught" (98)—Hythloday counters by pointing to "them that come out of the wars maimed and lame…and by reason of weakness and lameness be not able to occupy their old crafts, and be too aged to learn new" (98-99). He argues that the greed of landowners, who enclose their pastures and forcibly displace those who once worked them, is the root cause of widespread unemployment, idleness, and thievery. Hythloday's structural analysis, as Kellie Robertson argues, is a quite novel one in the history of discourse around vagrancy, decoupling vagrancy from immorality by showing that idleness was a product of socioeconomic factors and not necessarily equivalent to the sin of sloth.[32] It is important to insist, however, that *Utopia* as a whole offers this discursive possibility alongside its opposites. The social engineering of Book II operates on the assumption of a fallen humanity innately disposed to crime, sin, and especially idleness, best corrected by the implementation of policies that either eliminate the temptation to crime or very sharply punish it in hope of deterrence. What we further encounter in Book II, more or less absent from Book I, is an attitude of disgust toward the indigent body, a sense that such bodies are not only unproductive to the commonwealth but repellent in their desires and habits. Paul Slack notes that moral reform of the poor was an "old theme, familiar in medieval sermons against idleness," but that the sixteenth-century poor laws were "reinforced by what appears to be a new revulsion against the dirt and disease as well as

[32] See Kellie Robertson, *The Laborer's Two Bodies: Labor and the "Work" of the Text in Medieval Britain, 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 189-90.

indiscipline of the poor, a fear of contamination which runs through much of the contemporary literature."[33] More seems to have had personal familiarity with the matter of containing contamination: in 1518 he joined forces with Cardinal Wolsey to use government resources, for the first time in English history, toward plague prevention.[34] Linda Woodbridge notes that the practices of home quarantine that developed out of this were "apt for an age prizing domesticity and fearing mobility—one cured plague by keeping the sick home, as the deserving poor were envisaged as sickly and housebound."[35] *Utopia* encodes some of this revulsion through its fantasy of a society where the poor, idle, and vagrant have become a spectral presence, a ubiquitous (everywhere) problem in Book I that vanishes utopically (into nowhere) in Book II. Where in Book I idleness and vagrancy result from the unjust privatization of property through enclosure, in Book II the idle body itself becomes, almost inexplicably in the wake of Book I, a major locus of derision, as I will explore further down.

Utopia solves this problem of vagrancy through structural apparatuses that ensure the employment of all Utopians. While its eradication of private property produces a functioning communist society, a ruling class of Syphogrants is devoted almost entirely to the facilitation and surveillance of others' work. "The chief and almost the only office of the Syphogrants," Hythloday explains, "is to see and take heed that no man sit idle, but that every one apply his own craft with earnest diligence" (136-37). While compulsory, Hythloday reassures his listeners that the Utopians are not "wearied from early in the morning to late in the evening with continual work like laboring and toiling beasts. For this is worse than the miserable and wretched condition of bondmen, which

[33] Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531-1782* (London: Macmillan Education, 1990), 15.
[34] For more on this see Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman Group, 1988).
[35] Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 179.

nevertheless is almost everywhere the life of workmen and artificers, saving in Utopia" (137).[36] (Here he elides, of course, that there is in fact also a class of bondmen in Utopia.) But even leisure time ought to be spent "well and thriftily upon some other science," and not "in riot or slothfulness" (137). As such, recreation is regulated: games of chance "they know not," but instead they entertain themselves with games of strategy and moral inculcation, like the game where virtues do battle against vices (137).

Hythloday boasts that even the six-hour workday is at times shortened when there is less labor to be done, so that "all the citizens should withdraw from the bodily service to the free liberty of the mind and garnishing of the same, for herein they suppose the felicity of this life to consist" (141). All Utopians, in other words, enjoy a life of moderate balance between *otium* and *negotium*, productively busying themselves for the good of the commonwealth before "withdraw[ing]" to the personal intellectual "liberty" that is the true crown of Utopian living, its realization of *eudaimonia*. But this is not quite accurate: Hythloday had just explained that potential intellectuals—who, with the Syphogrants, are exempt from the labor mandate—who do not perform according to expectation are "forthwith plucked back to the company of artificers" (139). Anyone wishing to travel to another city, even for reasons of intellectual curiosity, is required by law to labor before being fed in that city (see 147). Most fundamentally, the entire apparatus by which labor is made compulsory and closely policed sits in deep ideological tension with the assertion that the Utopian mind takes priority over the body. While the labor mandate seems to have been instituted to make the communism of Utopia possible, Hythloday's empathic discourse of structural poverty and unemployment will shade, especially in Book II, into an affective distaste

[36] The text itself counts the workday at "six hours" (Sacks, 138), though this fails to carry through in the actual description of the workday, which has the Utopians working six hours before noon and then three more after dinner and rest, for a total of nine hours (see 137). Still, as Sacks notes, "the nine-hour total is well below the twelve- to fourteen- and even sixteen-hour days put in by ordinary farmers and craftsmen in More's era" (138n40).

for the non-laboring, unproductive body, so that it becomes impossible to think the two discourses apart. The "maimed and lame" veterans he invokes in Book I, for example, are reconstituted in Book II into malingering dissemblers: to a list enumerating those who "in other countries liveth idle" (women, priests, those in religious orders, and landed men and their servants), Hythloday appends "sturdy and valiant beggars, cloaking their idle life under the color of some disease or sickness" (138). If in Book I sickness is a cause of systemic unemployment, by Book II it has become a suspicious category, a theatrical "cloak" for idle living. Further, the list of the idle—Hythloday's attempt to demonstrate that well over "half of the whole number" of populations outside Utopia does not labor (138)—is a falsifying construction. The near-total erasure of women's labor flies in the face of the historical reality, and the indictment of priests and monastics as idle was a familiar topic of controversy.[37] Idleness emerges not merely as an undesirable result of economic restructuring but as a bodily disposition that is objectionable in itself.

Here I pause to note that the translation I use is Robynson's, and bears much of his midcentury awareness of the development of the secular poor laws. The earliest of these, a proto-welfare system of poor relief through taxation at the parish level, had been passed in 1536 to fill the vacuum in poor relief left by the dissolution of the monasteries that same year. Another, more immediate context for Robynson's English translation is Kett's Rebellion of 1549, a violent uprising against land enclosure in which rebels succeeded in capturing the city of Norwich and holding it for a few days. Accordingly, the Yale edition contains comparatively fewer uses of "riot" or "riotous," Robynson's preferred translation of More's Latin term *luxus* ("luxury"). While this

[37] On medieval and early modern women's economic contributions, see Alexandra Shepard, "Crediting Women in the Early Modern English Economy," *History Workshop Journal* 79.1 (2015): 1-24; Kathryn Reyerson, "Urban Economies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 295-310; and Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005). For a Marxist consideration of women's labor under capitalism, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004).

sometimes has the effect of transmuting More's critique of the money economy or the aristocracy into a denunciation of popular unrest, it still does adequately reflect Book II's broader thematic tendency to connect idleness to the threat of revolt, as I will show further down. Here, what I want to propose is that, as Hythloday's list of the idle suggests, work and idleness are neither stable nor fixed categories but rather subject to interpretation and contestation, reflecting the anxieties of a transitional period that saw the gradual dissolution of feudal ties based on obligation into displaced wage labor based on economic convenience. As these changes developed, it became increasingly necessary to discursively construct new definitions of productivity, or find ways to reconceptualize the old. Hythloday ventures such a definition through a critique of the ways work is organized outside Utopia:

> Now consider with yourself, of these few that do work, how few are occupied in necessary works, for where money beareth all the swing, there many vain and superfluous occupations must needs be used to serve only for riotous superfluity and unhonest pleasure. For the same multitude that now is occupied in work, if they were divided into so few occupations as the necessary use of nature requireth, in so great plenty of things as then of necessity would ensue, doubtless the prices would be too little for the artificers to maintain their livings. (139)

This is a logistical argument at core, attempting to "divide" an unproductive (though, importantly, not idle) "multitude," whose work has failed to facilitate anything "necessary" for the commonwealth, and relocate these workers into fewer and more useful trades. It is also an argument against the money economy: knowing that the overproduction of necessities would result in a surplus that brings down prices and profit, artificers have, in the aggregate, developed

something like a luxury economy to ensure their enrichment by providing for desire rather than for need. Hythloday's argument in certain ways anticipates one that Karl Marx will make in the *Grundrisse*: "The great historic quality of capital," Marx proposes, "is to create this surplus labour, superfluous labour from the standpoint of mere use value, mere subsistence."[38] Though his focus is on labor hours worked in excess of what is essential to provide for the laborer's daily needs, Marx's is a similarly logistical argument that understands the redirection of profit as facilitated by an unnecessary structural surplus or superfluity. But Marx continues: "[I]ts historic destiny is fulfilled as soon as…capital, acting on succeeding generations, has developed general industriousness as the general property of the new species." People continue to work hours beyond what is necessary because "general industriousness"—the compulsion to keep busy, to assert oneself as a worker or actant—has become fully reified into the practices of daily life, obscuring the distinction between the necessary and the superfluous.

Utopia notices what Marx will about the emerging centrality of a necessity-versus-superfluity rubric of economic redevelopment oriented around the hegemony of money or capital ("where money beareth all the swing"). But where Marx, with an additional three centuries of capitalism behind him, can identify "general industriousness" as part of the affective con-trick capitalism plays to ensure the surpluses it needs, More offers such industriousness as the remedy to an emergent economy of superfluity.[39] Packed into this is a diachronic appeal to the legibility of superfluity as immoral overindulgence, drawn from a long tradition of Stoic and Christian

[38] Karl Marx, "The *Grundrisse*," in *The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 249.

[39] For a polemical extension of this concept of general industriousness that asks why capitalism's laborers seemingly allow themselves to be exploited, see Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza & Marx on Desire*, trans. Gabriel Ash (London: Verso, 2014). The early modern text from which Lordon draws is Étienne de la Boétie, *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* [1576], trans. James B. Atkinson and David Sices (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012). For an argument about "emotional capitalism," see Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

denunciations of immoderation, as well as to the perilous structural role of surplus in Book I's (or the later Marxian) sense.[40] *Utopia*, in other words, wields a late medieval denunciation of sloth against the culture of greed that ends up producing slothful bodies, putting it in the odd position of condemning capitalist displacement by condemning the vulnerable—and, as Book I had insisted, faultless—bodies that capital produces. Hythloday's critique of the money economy is indeed subtended both by a disgust for excess (suggested in "riotous," "superfluous," "unhonest," "many") and by a related insistence on certain kinds of work as "natural" and necessary, others by contrast as unnatural, dispensable, and "vain." Thus the emergence of industriousness as remedy both to the problem of superfluous or unnecessary work and to the problem of idleness.

But for Hythloday it is not enough to be merely industrious; one must be industrious to the right ends. The shortcoming of his argument, at least from the vantage of late capital, is that he never explains where the "divi[sions]" between right and wrong ends lie. Some kinds of work are simply necessary, others are not; and those that are not are always and everywhere indivisible from greed and "unhonest pleasure," instantly wrapped into the moralist tradition that reads superfluity as debauchery. He then continues:

> But if all these that be now busied about unprofitable occupations, with all the whole flock of them that live idly and slothfully, which consume and waste everyone of them more of these things that come by other men's labor than two of the workmen themselves do, if all these (I say) were set to profitable occupations, you easily perceive how little time would be enough, yea, and too much to store us

[40] We might, again, turn to Chaucer's Pardoner for an example of this meaning of superfluity: "Whan man so drinketh of the white and rede / That of his throte he maketh his privee / Thurgh thilke cursed superfluitee" (334, lines 238-240). Through the sense of excessive indulgence that attaches to early uses of both "riot" and "luxury," one can see the logic in Robynson's translation of *luxus* as "riotous superfluity."

> with all things that may be requisite either for necessity or for commodity, yea, or for pleasure, so that the same pleasure is true and natural. (139)

Here a sense of the "profitable," which was only implicit in the first half of the passage, comes explicitly into the discussion. Hythloday, again, likely means to advance a logistical argument: if more people are put to work, and if all work done by them is useful, then total profit will increase. But he has not explained how the profit-motive he advocates here is distinct from the disgust for excess he had previously presented as its inverse. How, in other words, might one model profit without excess? Even if "profitably" here is more or less synonymous with "productively"—profitable work being that which produces something necessary, without meaning to imply surplus—this gets troubled by the overdetermined categories that close the passage: "necessity," "commodity," and "pleasure," all of which are enjoyed abundantly in Utopia, encompass just about all forms of work and their products, troubling the preceding distinction between an economy of necessity and one of luxury, or at least making the boundaries between these uncertain. The vision of communal abundance ("too much to store with us") may prevent the consolidation of wealth into only a few hands, but without knowing which labors Hythloday considers necessary and which superfluous, we have only a weak sense of how the Utopian economy sustains itself. In the absence of mechanisms for ensuring absolute profitability through restricting labor to what is necessary, what *Utopia* expresses is a largely apophatic desire for the elimination of "waste"—waste that Hythloday locates in the bodies of "them that live idly."

This is not to take Hythloday's argument to task for expressing a desire rather than elaborating a detailed program of reform. Rather, I emphasize that its instinct for taxonomy—its distinctions between the unproductive idle, unproductive workers, and productive workers—suggests, for all its seeming confidence, a profound *uncertainty* about what productivity means in

the economic upheavals of transition. *Utopia* desires productivity and thus compels everyone to work by law, but glides quickly over the first problem it encounters, that being "busied" does not in itself guarantee productivity or usefulness. In response, Utopian labor is simply "true and natural," a perfect though nebulous negation of England's unproductive labor. And then there is the "flock" of the idle—subtly conflated here with the sheep that have displaced them—who are imagined without qualification as "slothful[]" and "waste[ful]," devouring the fruits of others' labor. Hythloday has again turned his Book I sympathies on their head: where before he described vagabonds as the victims of enclosers who "consume, destroy, and devour whole fields, houses, and cities" through their metonymically ravenous sheep (101), here it is the idle themselves who anthropophagously consume honest workers. The turn to sloth and waste rounds out the moral-affective argument: the final object of Hythloday's scorn is the sluggish, gluttonous, profligate body, universalized here as the body of the non-worker. If these bodies were forced to work profitably, says Hythloday, one would see "how little time would be enough" to reap the profits. The laboring body of author More, anxious about the timeliness of his textual output in his letter to Giles, peeks out here from behind the curtain.[41]

The perceived homogeneity of this idling class suggests an attempt at reducing the terms and objects of Book I's analysis into something like "general industriousness." Without defining what counts as unproductive or superfluous work, *Utopia* raises the specter of this middle term only to quash it from its polity. After explaining the Utopian restrictions on travel, which can happen only by permit and only after the traveler has done due work in the city of their destination, Hythloday brings the long arc of his discussion on Utopian labor to a close:

[41] As Sadlek shows, medieval authors from Chaucer to John Gowan and William Langland "not only expressed the urgent nature of time's passing…but also underscored the need to produce something of value for the common good" (24). In many ways continuous with the late medieval tradition, More is nonetheless among the first, by virtue of his historical moment, to wrestle with productivity's ambiguous meaning in the era of early capitalist accumulation.

> Now you see how little liberty they have to loiter; how they can have no cloak or pretense to idleness. There be neither wine taverns, nor alehouses, nor stews, nor any occasion for vice or wickedness, no lurking corners, no places of wicked councils or unlawful assemblies. But they be in the present sight and under the eyes of every man, so that of necessity they must either apply their accustomed labor or else recreate themselves with honest and laudable pastimes. (147-48)

The suspicious Hythloday of Book II is here in peak form, gesturing to both the surveilling eye and the surety of custom to ward off the threat of idleness. But this Hythloday also expressly evokes the menace of insurrection: not only do the idle engage in vice (in taverns, brothels, and other spaces of "unhonest pleasure" [*libidinis*]), but they also gather in secret corporate bodies that are already quasi-seditious in their "unlawful[ness]." Riot, originally signifying debauchery, was legally defined in the sixteenth century as a gathering of three or more people assembled for an unlawful act.[42] Ultimately, for Hythloday, it is excess of "liberty" (*licentia*) that is to blame for contravention of law and order: if such liberty is not curbed by work, vice and even insurrection will ensue. The Hythloday who had pointed to disability to counter the layperson's suggestion that unemployment is an index of unwillingness to work now recenters the will: the liberty allotted by too much free time, he insists, will dispose people toward permanent worklessness and, from there, to anarchy. Certainly, the elimination of money is the major structural mechanism for also eliminating the kinds of unproductive work Hythloday had condemned earlier. Money, however, is absent from these concluding remarks, where the body itself—predisposed to sloth, waste, and riot, and always seeking a "pretense" to idle—emerges as the fundamental threat to productivity.

[42] For more on the legality of rioting, see Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 33-41.

Only work can discipline such a body. The relative lightness of the Utopian workday, which might seem to challenge this reading, in fact reinforces it: because any amount of work will suffice, what the text desires is a body not exhausted by too much work, but one whose basest impulses are moderated by the very act of working. But this work is not quite synonymous with the working day; rather, what *Utopia* offers is a generalized predisposition toward industriousness as an ultimate ideological value. The Utopians do away with alehouses not because work has left them too tired to enjoy them, and not, even, because the inherently disciplinary effect of work has expunged the desire for the alehouse in the first place. The desire, apparently, persists, in "liberty" and in "pretense," but the Utopians nonetheless reject these spaces of idle play "of necessity"—Hythloday's tantalizingly ambiguous explanation that seems to suggest both external compulsion and self-discipline at once.

We are thus prepared to return to the question of class. I have explored an apparent disjunction between the play of both More and his English translator, Robynson, as against the play of the Utopians. The former is ironic, liberated, even heterodox, while the latter is suspicious and closely policed. The insurrectionary tendencies in the play of the common people—imaginary Utopian citizens and More's dreaded vernacular readership alike—threaten the more refined *otium* of the educated elite. Consequently, play and work prove slippery categories, with humanist play revealing itself as a sophisticated form of work that is always in danger of being misapprehended by the masses whose simple play tends toward anarchy. This means that the problem of *Utopia*'s own playful ambiguity, normally couched as a genre question—is the text more literary fantasy, even a kind of high-literary joke, or an earnest tractate for radical reform?—ought to be understood as a class question, with its own position toward bodily agency, play, and work reified somewhere

in the gap between form and substance.[43] The question tends to be answered in a more or less postmodernist way, whatever the sensibilities of the critic—that is, as performing "a paradigm for Renaissance writing's refusal of closure" where language opens itself up as endlessly interpretable.[44] *Utopia*'s objective, certainly, is to play, since the actors in More's coterie can be trusted to play with heterodox ideas in a way that will not actually threaten orthodoxy. But this play accomplishes something more definite than "refusal." It enacts the value and meaning of a play that is productive as the special property of a certain class actor in the moments of early capitalist accumulation, this productivity illuminated by what is more or less its opposite or foil—the general industriousness, tied to compulsory work, that characterizes the Utopian polity so playfully described. Mechanisms of discipline, including the regulation of games, keep this general industriousness operative; but the play of the author, already self-regulating, proves its own worth to the emergent economy which Utopia can transcend only by displacement into Nowhere. In these multiple layers of irony, what does become clear is that, while *Utopia*'s radical wish is for a new totality and a new world, as a literary "product" it performs its own utility in the English world that is coming to be. In short, it expertly problematizes what it means to be productive in an economy that is doing the same.

To this end, it is fitting that the dialogue in Book I more or less begins with discussion of a projected act of labor: the possibility of Hythloday's being an advisor to kings. Hythloday rejects the offer, reviling it as "bondage" (95). When Giles pushes back with an argument about

[43] Quentin Skinner provides a compendious, if by now somewhat dated, overview of the critical genealogy of debates around what More sought to achieve with his ideal commonwealth. See Skinner, "Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and the Language of Renaissance Humanism," in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 123-24.

[44] Thomas Healy, "Playing Seriously in Renaissance Writing," in *Renaissance Transformations: The Making of English Writing 1500-1650*, ed. Margaret and Thomas Healy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2009), 23. An older iteration of this position can be found in C.S. Lewis, who similarly drains the text of closure by categorizing it as a *jeu d'esprit* or game for gaming's sake (see Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954]).

"bestow[ing] your time fruitfully," Hythloday retorts with an affirmation of the joys of leisure: "Now I live at liberty after mine own mind and pleasure," he says, "which I think very few of these great states and peers of realms can say" (95). In the context of *Utopia* as a whole, this tethering of leisure to self-possessive agency is striking, as is the disapproval of a productive busyness inimical to liberty. Book I was almost certainly composed after Book II, making Hythloday's avowal of leisure all the more remarkable. While continuous with a classical valuation of *otium negotiosum*, it bears emphasizing that Hythloday here reserves for himself the same "liberty" he had condemned in loiterers and idlers, and pushes back against the same argument about time he had advanced in his vision of Utopian productivity.[45] Further, the description of courtly life as slavery or "bondage" totally collapses the Utopian hierarchy that carefully distinguishes an enslaved criminal class from the agents of state bureaucracy and surveillance.

Much biographical criticism has noted that More was himself debating whether to accept an advisory role in the court of Henry VIII at the time of writing *Utopia*, and that Hythloday's firm rejection of the offer for a life of *otium* is a kind of fantasy of the decision More himself ultimately did not, or perhaps felt himself unable to, make.[46] The merit of this biographical reading, for my analysis, is that it gives us a picture of More carefully working through the meaning and significance of his work in ways that reflect the discussion of vocation and idle time in his prefatory letter to Giles. What I have sought to draw attention to are the various ways in which both work and play are represented, recast, and rendered legible according to class status, and by rubrics that

[45] Skinner analyzes this conversation in terms of its classical referents, with Hythloday advancing "standard [Platonic] arguments in favour of *otium*" and More responding in the language of the "Ciceronian civic humanist" (132). As Norbrook notes, *Utopia* is modeled on the classical rhetorical mode of *disputatio in utramque partem*, or "arguing both sides of the question."

[46] Stephen Greenblatt's reading remains one of the most compelling. Here, More's humorous play is a coping mechanism that helps him negotiate a private, inner self that rejects the ostentation and vainglory of a society in which the outer self must move; see Greenblatt's first chapter in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*: *From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980).

make assumptions about the affective and relational dispositions of the bodies that inhabit a class identity. There seems to be a gap in the way author More negotiated this identity for himself and the way Hythloday negotiates it in his description of life and social relations in Utopia.

III. WASTING AWAY

Thus far, I have tried to puzzle through the distinct and often conflicted modes of analysis More's Hythloday brings to the problem of unemployment in early sixteenth-century England. Here I add another apparent tension: while, as I have been arguing, Utopia's disciplinary mechanisms assume and preemptively correct for a body disposed to idleness, Hythloday's Utopians are regularly portrayed as healthy, robust, and satisfied by their work—"the direct antitypes of English vagrants," as Richard Halpern describes them.[47] This reaches toward one of the most enduring critical questions asked of the text: does *Utopia* achieve the results it desires through careful social and political engineering, or does it begin by assuming the results it then claims—by, as Halpern argues, embedding European desires into the Utopian imaginary in order to have Utopia solve problems it would never have encountered? Certainly in Book I, the English body is strengthened or debilitated by economic practices (enclosure and the like) that delimit opportunity; but in Book II, the Utopian body is often preconstituted to complement the social, political, and economic structures already in place, as when Hythloday describes Utopian men as "naturally bent and inclined" to their father's craft (136). In the chapter "Of Sciences, Crafts, and Occupations," I find a particularly instructive example of the way *Utopia* presupposes the kinds of bodies it wants for maximizing social cohesion:

[47] Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), 155.

> All the void time, that is between the hours of work, sleep, and meat that they be suffered to bestow, every man as he liketh best himself, not to the intent that they should misspend this time in riot or slothfulness, but, being then licensed from the labor of their own occupations, to bestow the time well and thriftily upon some other science as shall please them. For it is a solemn custom there to have lectures daily early in the morning, where to be present they only be constrained that be namely chosen and appointed to learning. Howbeit, a great multitude of every sort of people, both men and women, go to hear lectures, some one and some another as every man's nature is inclined. Yet, this notwithstanding, if any man had rather bestow this time upon his own occupation (as chanceth in many whose minds rise not in the contemplation of any science liberal), he is not letted nor prohibited, but is also praised and commended as profitable to the commonwealth. (137)

There are three stages to this description, and, simplified, they reveal a deft sleight-of-hand. Hythloday says that the Utopians can use their free time to attend lectures; but only those "chosen and appointed to learning" (that is, the intellectual class, already exempt from the labor mandate) can be in attendance; meanwhile, those who already belong to the laboring class are free to spend their leisure time doing more work. Presented as a matter of will and inclination ("as he liketh best himself"; "as shall please them"; "as every man's nature is inclined"), what this account actually offers is two pre-formed bodies: those inclined to learning, and those built for labor. Given that only one hour per day is expressly designated for play and two for daytime rest (see 137), we must therefore assume that the average Utopian in fact works much longer than the six hours Hythloday initially advertises.

Thus, if Utopia's program of compulsory work assumes a body always in danger of regressing into idleness, a competing textual discourse imagines the Utopians as overeager to produce. The value of this robust, even hyperproductive body will cash out just a few pages later, in the well-known passage that articulates a colonialist vision of land acquisition through forced removal of native inhabitants. Here the text seems to anticipate, in rather astonishing detail, the regimes of compulsory labor through plantation that were implemented in, for example, colonial Ireland. William Rhodes has recently shown how the Irish were interpreted by their English colonizers as idle "wasters" according to "a long tradition of vernacular economic moralism, which reads an unplowed, unenclosed, or unimproved landscape as a sign of moral failure and communal decadence."[48] This discourse was born, in part, in a Reformation polemic that recommended large-scale agrarian production over and against native Irish practices like nomadic herding (booleying), since it grounded laborers and thus confirmed both their limited mobility and, to English eyes, amplified productivity. In her excellent chapter on "Utopia, Ireland, and the Tudor Shock Doctrine," Sarah Hogan emphasizes that this "imperialist ideology [was] simultaneously capitalist in its vision."[49] In Ireland, for example, the English converted their military lords, who had already been occupying the island for some time, into landlords who extracted rent payments from the subdued Irish, effecting the forceful "transformation of land into property, and natives into tenants, wage laborers, and often, slaves."[50] The objective was not simply to subdue the colonized Irish but to fully integrate them, for profit, into the preexisting economic formations of England.[51] In light

[48] William Rhodes, "Why Colin Clout Came Back: English Reformation Literature and Edmund Spenser's Late Work," *ELH* 84.3 (2017): 507. On waste, see also Julia Lupton, "Mapping Mutability: Or, Spenser's Irish Plot," in *Representing Ireland: Literature and the Origins of Conflict, 1534-1660*, ed. Brendan Bradshaw, Andrew Hadfield, and Willy Maley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93-115.
[49] Hogan, 110.
[50] Hogan, 112.
[51] For more on this see Hogan, 107-14; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003), 79-80; Lupton, "Mapping Mutability"; and R.H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967).

of such projects, Hogan draws an important distinction between the literary utopia (More's *Utopia* or Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*), where the ideal society is found or discovered as a finished totality, and the "colonial or projector's utopia" (Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*), which is "better understood as a utopia *of* transition, given its willingness to scheme a plan for radical socio-spatial reform," often in the painstaking logistical detail *Utopia* largely lacks.[52] In the violence that enables such reform, where native inhabitants are reconstituted into wage-laborers through the privatization of formerly communal lands, we see a specifically capitalist mode of operation that is simultaneously a utopian one, driven by an "impulse to subject what it sees as a disorganized raw material to a rational ordering."[53]

If Utopian description normally conveys a sense of permanence and fixity, a confidence in the self-replicability of institutional practice, we find in *Utopia*'s defense of violent land acquisition a polity still in process of becoming. The glimpse is brief, since, as Hogan argues, More's *Utopia* is more concerned with describing the polity as it is rather than chronicling how it came to be. However, its defense of landgrabbing seems so incongruous with its rejection of warmongering, private property, and material possession that it merits careful attention. If anything, such a defense gives credence to the argument that *Utopia*, while it is many things, emerges above all as an encomium to the productive body. Utopia needs hyperproductive citizens—eager to "bestow [their] time well and thriftily upon some science"—not in order to ensure social reproduction (already guaranteed through structures of surveillance and fixed divisions of labor) but to facilitate an abundant productivity as a kind of universal social imperative:

[52] Hogan, 96.
[53] Holstun, 13.

> But if so be that the multitude throughout the whole island pass and exceed the due number, then they choose out of every city certain citizens and build up a town under their own laws in the next land where the inhabitants have much waste and unoccupied ground, receiving also of the same country people to them if they will join and dwell with them….But if the inhabitants of that land will not dwell with them to be ordered by their laws, then they drive them out of those bounds which they have limited and appointed out for themselves. And if they resist and rebel, then they make war against them, for they count this the most just cause of war, when any people holdeth a piece of ground void and vacant to no good or profitable use, keeping others from the use and possession of it, which notwithstanding by the law of nature ought thereof to be nourished and relieved. (142)

Here the land figures not as a subjugated object, as it would by the end of the century (think, most notoriously, of Sir Walter Ralegh's virginal Guiana awaiting English rape), but rather as an impoverished subject in need of nourishment and relief, like the so-called deserving poor who would be placed for the first time on parish poor-rates just two decades after *Utopia*'s publication. Hythloday imagines the *topos* itself as a vagrant subject whose productive potential only awaits proper instrumentalization. Here, land is transformed into property through labor, so that property is made property by virtue of production-power—just as the vagrant body enters into political community through its productive labor. The occupation of land for the purpose of improving it doubles, of course, as a convenient solution to the problem of overpopulation the Utopians initially face, and here again we find Utopia reflected in a contemporaneously English situation (presciently, since it would be several decades before England's population crisis would become

acute).[54] Hythloday does not enumerate the social problems that are expected from the overpopulation of Utopian towns, nor where the "next land[s]" for their resettlement are located (recall that Utopia is an island), so that, as in the passage on "superfluous" labor, surplus or excess emerges as its own kind of conceptual problem in need of redress. The availability of undernourished land helps rectify the imbalance, siphoning Utopia's excess population into the imagined void of alien terrain so that a satisfying equilibrium can be achieved. Were it not for the historical reality of the discovery of the New World, imagined as mostly vacant and limitless space, the irruption here of "unoccupied ground" would almost seem a narrative convenience, a way of imaginatively diffusing labor power without needing to account for materiality. While English settlements in America were almost a century away and literary propagandas of Irish "waste" had not yet fully taken off, the spatial imaginary of unlimited land, endlessly fruitful *in potentia*, gives *Utopia* its distinctly, almost clairvoyantly, colonialist understanding of property as a labor-relation.

The word that Robynson translates as "town" is *colonia*, making More, as Ellen Meiksins Wood points out, "the first major English writer to revive the ancient Roman concept of *colonia* to designate the settlement of foreign lands."[55] The emphasis on cultivating productive land likely derives not from colonialist discourses directly (in 1516, More would have needed to pull these mainly from Spanish), but from trends in English tenancy law under early capitalism, which, as Wood traces, had begun to permit making "'improvement' of land a condition of leases."[56] Still, as *Utopia* proves, the utility of these discourses of productivity to the question of foreign land

[54] See Slack for more on the population explosion and its effects on labor organization in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. See also Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006).
[55] E. Wood, 74.
[56] E. Wood, 76. For more on cultivable land and rent agreements, see *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. T.H. Aston and H.E. Philpin (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985).
30-75; and Heller, 42-43.

acquisition makes itself felt almost as soon as the American landmass comes into view of Europe. It presents one problem (how to put the terrain to productive use?) while solving another (the land will receive Europe's surplus populations). As Mark Netzloff argues, domestic crises informed colonial policy while the subjects of colonial displacement and subjugation were read back into the same domestic conditions of crisis that produced them in the first place, creating a kind of feedback loop that emphasizes the "interconnections between discourses of class and race."[57]

The robust Utopian body, then, turns out to be the ideal imperialist agent. The Utopians do not neglect their land since they have been imaginatively pre-formed for work—in particular, for land management and husbandry, suited for the work of agrarian capitalism even if they have successfully eliminated its structures of tenancy and privatization. Indeed, Utopia itself is organized much like an Irish-style "consumption-oriented redistributive economy," yet its colonialist ambitions anticipate an English program of displacement, subjection, and plantation that would actually convert Ireland's redistributive economy into a profit-motivated one based largely on income from renting out cultivable land.[58] In this, *Utopia* discloses its transitional character by preferring pre-capitalistic modes of production even while adopting capital's tendency toward displacement in the name of productivity. By naturalizing the impulse to displace indigenous populations, the Utopians have in many ways ironically replicated the displacement logic of enclosure that Book I condemns.

Hythloday would likely counter that enclosers act out of greed for material wealth, not through any prerogative to cultivate and replenish wasted land; but this distinction in motive makes little difference to the material reality of a displaced population in need of reconstitution. In *Utopia*,

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[57] Mark Netzloff, *England's Internal Colonies: Class, Capital, and the Literature of Early Modern English Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3.
[58] Jane Ohlmeyer, "'Civilizinge of those rude partes': Colonization within Britain and Ireland, 1580s-1640s,' in *The Origins of Empire*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 127.

Book I's English vagrants are reconstituted into Book II's hyperproductive Utopian workers; in Spenser's much later *View*, Irenius will argue in an almost identical vein that the Irish, though "outlaws" and "theeves" in their "waste wilde places," are "fit for labour, and industriously disposed."[59] "Labor" here, of course, means English labor, labor performed according to English constructions of productivity; if the Irish are idle wasters and thieving marauders when left to their own devices, they can be suddenly transfigured into industrious bodies fit for work on English plantations—a transfiguration that, as "disposed" suggests, Irenius takes as entirely naturalized. In the more established contemporary *imperium* of Spain, similar discourses were attempting to racialize labor by debating the relative merits of native American versus African workers.[60] Capitalism, in and as colonialist displacement, thus invents the idle/industrious body, a body that is at once one *and* the other, that (in a self-enclosing logic) is always already idle when beyond the rhythms of a capitalistic mode of production and always already industrious within it. By articulating and promoting such a dual discourse of the body, *Utopia*, if unwittingly, idealizes the affective engines of primitive accumulation even as it levels a timely critique of capitalist practices of exploitation.

The centrality of *topos* to its vision of work renders Utopian communism into a semi-feudalism where the proper placement of working bodies is paramount, as Halpern, Kendrick, and others have argued. But against this fixity of placement rises the threat of *licentia*, *Utopia*'s unwanted by-product of topographical dis-placement. And yet, where it already finds *licentia* (in

[59] Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland* [1596], ed. Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 55-56, 22.
[60] "The Spaniards," as Eric Williams writes, "discovered that one Negro was worth four Indians. A prominent official in Hispaniola insisted in 1518 that 'permission be given to bring Negroes, a race robust for labor, instead of natives, so weak that they can only be employed in tasks requiring little endurance'" (*Capitalism and Slavery* [1944] [Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994], 9). For a more recent history of concepts about slavery in England, see Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

"waste and unoccupied ground"), *Utopia* turns to these same technologies of dis-placement in order, ultimately, to suture unduly liberated populations to land, transforming land into property through their industrious labor. Even if this land becomes a commons under Utopian governance, it is only by violence—and by a specifically capitalistic logic of appropriation through displacement—that the land can be obtained in the first place, frustrating the logics of non-ownership and rejection of private property that otherwise structure Utopian life.

What, then, of play? The imperatives of colonial nourishment, cultivation, and elimination of waste—neutralizing the excess populations of the colonizer, and reconstituting the "idle" colonized into workers—seemingly make all purposeless activity inconceivable. But *Utopia* does something unexpected: rather than identifying play with purposeless activity, it takes play into the emergent work-discipline. I have identified the many ways in which the Utopian polity seems to eradicate the kind of play or *otium negotiosum* it allows its own author, but from its own perspective this eradication is actually a reconstitution, even a restoration: excising all tendencies toward immoderation, superfluity, and riot, *Utopia* envisions a play that is decorous, that restores the player to a right relation with the governing polity.

The notion that play, properly exercised, can be profitable to a political and economic order is one that will have longstanding consequences for the development of English capitalism in the sixteenth century and beyond. Indeed, as the following chapters will show, productive play is taken up by the more commercialistic, mercantile world of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries and given new purchase. If More means to reserve this form of play for an elite humanist in-group, sharply demarcating it from the riotous energies of the populace, the dramatists working at the turn of the seventeenth century will represent a much more diffuse, financialized, sensuous, and eroticized feeling for play. In these dramas, owing in many ways to the medium of theatrical

play itself, play relations are not to be socially divided from work relations but, rather, continually break into and reconfigure the social life of work.

CHAPTER 2

To "cast with cunning"; or, Marlowe's Market Players

"But every night all the men would come around
And lay their money down."
—Cher, "Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves"

I. A SHEPHERD'S MARKET

This chapter is about the representation of market play in the drama and poetry of Christopher Marlowe. Here I use the term "market" to signify many kinds of economic relation, some of them monetary and others invested in the circulation of valuable objects. I use "play" to capture something of the ludic energy that drives these market relations, an energy which very often in Marlowe shades into the erotic. "Erotic," for my purposes, means rooted in desire, especially the desire for another person to use their body toward a particular end: a relational desire, which is very often also a desire for mastery over the relation. It is not always sexually motivated —though it often is, or could be. Market play thus has to do with the purposeful manipulation of the circuits of desire that course through economic life, in the interest of profit in one form or another. As in the previous chapter, I will be interested in how this species of play does its own kind of work. Though we are a long way from Thomas More, I will address the movement from late feudalism to merchant capitalism, and from utopian narrative to public theater, further down.

I want to begin, however, with Marlowe's only short lyric poem, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." The poem's influence on English lyric "is equaled by that of few poems," and through it "a literary device was created—the invitation to love—which, in one form or

another…has persisted down into our own days."[1] The first of its kind in English, the poem inherits Theocritan, Virgilian, Ovidian, and even biblical fields of representation and modes of address, fitting the poem within the venerable traditions both of pastoral poetry and of what Patrick Cheney terms Ovidian amatory lyric.[2] I want to suggest, however, that the poem not only echoes this classical voice but also articulates a distinctly mercantilist mode of address, one which I will also locate in two of Marlowe's stage plays. Its mercantile sensibility is latent, since the scene of the poem is not a marketplace and the material objects which it catalogues can only, in a very qualified way, be called commodities.[3] Nonetheless, the poet's invitational mode depends upon his conviction—one might even call it his wager—that the production and circulation of select material goods will awaken or cultivate desire in an imagined consumer, the recipient of the invitation. The poet thus engages in "the social production of a marketable self," or what Ceri Sullivan calls "the habitus of the merchant."[4] Likely composed in the mid-to-late 1580s, just as Marlowe was also inaugurating his dramatic career, the poem is quoted in some of Marlowe's plays, including in his mercantile tragedy *The Jew of Malta*—a moment of self-referentiality whose significance I will explore at the conclusion of this chapter.[5]

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[1] R.S. Forsythe, "'The Passionate Shepherd'; and English Poetry," *PMLA* 40 (1925): 742.

[2] Patrick Cheney, "Career Rivalry and the Writing of Counter-Nationhood: Ovid, Spenser, and Philomela in Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,'" *ELH* 65.3 (1998): 524.

[3] If we accept Karl Marx's preliminary definition of commodity in volume 1 of *Capital*—that " a commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another"—then the objects of this poem seem to qualify as commodities in the most basic sense (Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition*, ed. Robert C. Tucker [New York: Norton, 1978], 303). However, and without broaching the much-debated question of how the value of a commodity is produced, a commodity is also an object traded or sold for another of roughly equivalent value. Here the question of whether to consider the objects of the poem commodities becomes thornier, since, while the shepherd appears to be offering them as a gift, the offer comes with the expectation of some form of amatory or erotic attention. Because of this expectation, I will read what happens in the poem as a trade or act of exchange, while recognizing that erotic attention is not a material object in the same vein as the poem's belts and shoes. Further, its objects don't meet other qualifications of the commodity, such as its ability to be mass-produced for a market; they are, rather, artisanal, the singular handmade product of the shepherd.

[4] Ceri Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of Credit: Merchants in Early Modern Writing* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2002), 11.

[5] Dating the poem has proven difficult since the recorded transmission history is thin. While it first appears in print in 1599, or six years after Marlowe's death, it was likely composed in or around 1588. For a detailed review, see Cheney, 545.

In order to give a sense of this mercantile voice, I reproduce the poem here in full:

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and vallies, dales and fields,
Woods or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair linèd slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw and ivy-buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs;
An if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd-swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.[6]

The enticements of roses, posies, wool, ivy-buds, and more serve to "prove" the poetic speaker's suitability as an erotic partner. By gathering and reworking the yields of nature in a way that best calls attention to their pleasing qualities, the poet hopes to ingratiate himself to his love interest through his craftsmanship. But, we'll notice, he is also quite anxious about the possible failure of such a project. The confident imperative that opens the poem—"Come live with me and be my

[6] Christopher Marlowe, "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love," in *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, 3 vol., ed. A. H. Bullen (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 3:283-84.

love"—has, by the final two stanzas, shifted into the more tentative conditional tense: "*If* these delights thy mind *may* move, / *Then* live with me, and be my love." After running through this exhaustive list of the goods one may want or need to move successfully through this pastoral world, the passionate shepherd shows a glimmer of recognition that it may not be enough. We might, then, read this moment of anxiety back into his recurring use of superlatives—"finest wool," "purest gold," the "thousand" posies that are also, in a familiar Renaissance pun, poesies, the *poiein* or "making" that interests Sir Philip Sidney and others. These are not just any material goods, the poet feels the need to claim, but the finest the pastoral world has to offer. Is this the poetic entreaty of a humble country swain, or the ware-peddling of a pushy merchant?

The poem's interest in materiality has been plenty remarked upon—C.S. Lewis called Marlowe "our great master of the material imagination"—but over the past few decades this has tended to give way (likely with *Tamburlaine*'s "high astounding terms" in mind) to a preference for language as the ultimate guarantor of the shepherd's success.[7] For many readers the poet is above all a rhetorician, using the resources of language to, as one critic puts it, "develop[] and perform[] an identity as a member of the pastoral world."[8] Further, we are told, "whether Marlowe's speaker actually has these items at his disposal or not is, in a way, beside the point because his invitation has already implied that he can and will make good on his offer….[I]t is the invitation, not legal property rights or a deed, that shows us who owns what and who belongs to what community."[9] In Douglas Bruster's influential reading, "the invitation of the Passionate Shepherd functions as a rhetorical version of the sexual act; the process of enumeration is intended to excite. If the speaker is able to draw the listener into shared delight at the numerous luxuries he

[7] C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), 486.
[8] Kimberly Huth, "Come Live With Me and Feed My Sheep: Invitation, Ownership, and Belonging in Early Modern Pastoral Literature," *Studies in Philology* 108.1 (2011): 58.
[9] Huth, 57.

or she catalogues, physical contact can become unnecessary."[10] Here, it is the cumulative effect of the poem's material goods as poetic possibilities—not their actual production or consumption—that will entice the poet's lover; or, as another critic puts it, "Marlowe's speaker is asking above all for imaginative interaction."[11]

Certainly, the poet's rhetorical confidence makes powerful erotic, utopian, and imaginative bids, but the very proliferation of the goods on offer, together with the power the poet appears to see invested in them, suggest that rhetoric is ultimately subordinated to the sheer materiality of what it attempts to describe. Surely it matters that the "if/then" of the poem's final stanzas depends upon the persuasive power invested in the things themselves. Indeed, Sir Walter Ralegh's companion poem, "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," spends only one line on the question of whether there is "truth in every shepherd's tongue" (line 2)—on the possibility of false or cheap rhetoric.[12] Instead, Ralegh's nymph lingers on the materialist bid of Marlowe's poem and responds to it with a vision of ecological death, reminding her suitor that all things will in the end "grow cold," "fade," "break," and "wither" (ll. 6-15). So much for the power of stuff; but if material things are this flimsy, the ephemeral spoken word doesn't stand a chance.

I don't mean to suggest that the poem's material economy takes priority over its rhetorical gestures. I am, after all, interested in what I've called its mercantile mode of address, the way in which its brand of persuasiveness feels not unlike commercialistic advertisement. Yet it does appear to be the case that if the goods themselves do not please, the poet will fail to attain the act of erotic exchange he seeks. The catalogue of goods and the invitation to imagine them thus fully

[10] Douglas Bruster, "'Come to the Tent Again': 'The Passionate Shepherd,' Dramatic Rape, and Lyric Time," *Criticism* 33.1 (1991): 52.
[11] Erik Gray, "Come Be My Love: The Song of Songs, Paradise Lost, and the Tradition of the Invitation Poem," *PMLA* 128.2 (2013): 379.
[12] Sir Walter Ralegh, "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," in *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, 3:285.

interlock in a triangulated circuit of desire between the poet, his addressee, and the wares on offer, seemingly conflating not only her desire for the goods and for him, but also his desire for her and his desire to convincingly look like a shepherd. And yet, for all the attempt to persuade the nymph of the authenticity of this shepherd's life with its shepherd's goods, we'll notice that the goods are perhaps less suited to the pastoral scene than they at first appear. The "finest wool" the poet promises can be sourced from the scene's "pretty lambs," and the flowers, leaves, and ivy buds have a clear provenance in the pastoral landscape; but where might the gold buckles, coral clasps, and amber studs come from? The gold derives quite probably from mines in the Americas; coral, though found the world over, concentrates most heavily in the seas of Southeast Asia and the Caribbean (in any case, surely not in the "shallow rivers" of rural England); and amber, while also widely distributed, was derived in Marlowe's day principally from the Baltic or Mediterranean regions. The shepherd's quaint "hills and vallies, dales and fields" have suddenly widened into the spaces of global trade. The features R.S. Forsythe identified in the many imitations of "The Passionate Shepherd"—that "the delights in store for the yielding nymph are not those of the literary pastoral, but the more prosaic and earthly joys to be expected by the wife of a more or less well-to-do yeoman"—are also true, it seems, of the Marlovian original.[13] Thus, we return to my original question: might this passionate shepherd be something closer to a merchant?

Indeed (and I am not the first to ask this), where does the poem's speaker come from? Is he from within or beyond the pastoral world he parades before his love? Pastoral has long been read as a site of tension between courtly and country life, in which the country figures as a *locus amoenus* or scene of fantastic longing for a courtly or sometimes urban visitor unfamiliar with but attracted to its ways. Its lyric voice is thus generally from without, rather than from within, the

[13] Forsythe, 694.

pastoral world it describes.[14] It is entirely possible, then, that the gold, coral clasps, and amber studs promised by the shepherd—who is referred to as "shepherd" only in the poem's title (which may have been added later by another hand) and nowhere in the poem itself—were brought into the scene from outside.[15] If this is true, then the speaker and his lover are tourists who retreat into the country to watch the shepherd-swains "dance and sing" for their amusement. They play shepherd by engaging in the kinds of industry necessary to rustic life, not out of earnest necessity but for its aesthetic and erotic appeal. Yet it is equally possible that the poem's speaker is in fact a bona fide shepherd with every ability to embroider a kirtle and make a gown of wool, but who, growing more anxious as the poem progresses, begins to offer goods beyond his ability and access. If this is the case, the appeal to gold, coral, and amber only further indexes the superlative quality of his rhetoric.

Without deciding, so to speak, on one or the other interpretation, it is crucial that the poem's speaker *sounds* like a merchant even if he is not a merchant in fact. The speaker is ultimately trying to get his love interest to do something, to "come live with me and be my love," a mode of invitation shaped by the appeals (and pressures) of circulating merchandise, operating throughout the poem as the currency of the poet's erotic bid. But even as the poem's goods-on-offer become increasingly more difficult to manufacture, making them (at least to the poet's eye) more aesthetically pleasing, the verbal shift from imperative to conditional betrays an anxiety about the success of this commercialistic strategy, until in a final bid for his addressee's affections the poet defers to the dancing and singing of the rural swains. This deferral to the labors of others, whose

[14] See William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 1968); Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973); and, very recently, Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2020).

[15] As Bruster notes, it is "unclear whether the speaker in Marlowe's lyric is actually a passionate shepherd or merely intends to watch them: the title of the poem, the authority of which is questionable, remains the only evidence for the former. The lyric voice belongs to one who will remain separate from the shepherds, watching them work and having them dance for his love" (51).

decided belonging to the pastoral scene accentuates the poet's own ambiguous position within it, suggests further unease about the poet's relational standing within a material culture that he had heretofore confidently appropriated. The poet makes the leap from use value to exchange value by trading the products of his work for erotic consummation; but the persuasive, invitational mode of address suggests an estrangement that, as I have been arguing, can be felt in the increasingly anxious tonality of the poem. From the perspective of Marxist analysis, this estrangement is perhaps unsurprising: "The estrangement [of worker from product] is manifested not only in the result but in the *act of production*—within the producing activity itself," Marx writes, suggesting that the poet, though not acting as a wage-laborer, has already been alienated from the community into which he invites his addressee (and, possibly, himself) through the very fact of producing something for another.[16] But because the erotic consummation for which these products are intended is never fully guaranteed—only petitioned for—the poet remains suspended within the conditions of possibility of his own work. Thus, aside from its first and final lines, most of the poem unfolds in future tense; the poet's promises to be productive in the ways he enumerates "will" happen only after the nymph has agreed to enter into the erotic contract with him. In this political economy, then, the tenuousness of a desire that might be refused must reify itself, to the greatest extent possible, in material goods that (the poet hopes) will enhance the pull of desire.

And yet, if the passionate shepherd and his love are really only "playing shepherd," the nature of this activity and the social relationship between the poem's two major actors must be reconsidered. In such a reading, the "prove" of line 2 means something closer to "try," "test," or "sample."[17] The invitation to "prove" "all the pleasures" of nature is an invitation to be shepherd for a day, to act within a more fictive economy of desire in which all subsequent making and

[16] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* 73, emphasis original.
[17] See *OED*, s.v., "prove, *n*," II.6.a.

working is imaginative and can thus rightly make use of objects, like gold and coral, that seem to materialize from nowhere into the scene of play. The Marlovian lyric voice belongs not to an anxious craftsman reliant upon yet also estranged by his labor and its products, but to a dilettante whose appeal to his lover is an invitation to playfully dabble in and construct the pastoral world alongside him. Further, the many responses to and imitations of "The Passionate Shepherd"—by Ralegh, Greene, Donne, Herrick, and others—in addition to combating the "the narcissism of the monological" by giving the poet's addressee a voice, take up the offer to play by introducing their own materials into the pastoral scene, or by reimagining the stakes of the poet's bid.[18] The poem itself, in other words, becomes a malleable plaything. Again, my purpose is not to arbitrate between these possible readings, but to suggest that the ambiguity itself turns on a question about the nature of work and play. What are the passionate shepherd and his love *doing*? And how does their relational *doing* mediate—and get mediated by—the catalogue of material things that circulate through the poem?

In "The Passionate Shepherd," we see work eroticized in a way that has made it into a version of play, whether the poet and his love are earnestly participating in the pastoral economy they describe or whether they are only touring it for their pleasure. The ambiguity about what kinds of energy circulate through this scene of courtship, artisanal production, and entertainment produces an ambivalent interfacing between the poet, the addressee, and the ambient pastoral world that may or may not successfully bring them into union. To call any of what the poet does (or says he will do) productive work feels beside the point, though production is at the heart of the poem's erotic bid; but it would also feel reductive to pass this off as escapist or merely recreative play, though that is very much its spirit. The poem's mercantile voice is the voice that synthesizes

[18] Bruster, 50.

both these relational modes, the voice that captures interest by advertising wares before they have been produced, thus opening up space for imaginative engagement with a potential consumer. But the advertisement itself is also not enough, since, in the yet-to-be realized future of the poem, it is left to the nymph to decide whether the objects on offer are truly pleasing. Thus the poem remains deliciously suspended in the invitation *to* desire, or, put another way, in the invitation to play—but this is a form of play whose erotic impulses are produced, curiously, by imagining a certain kind of work.

‡‡‡

I've opened with this reading of "The Passionate Shepherd" because I think it helpfully contextualizes the concerns with relationality, status, and rivalry that will also characterize much of Marlowe's drama. Reading this poem as a tensive exchange between work and play, it is not difficult to see why Marlowe was attracted to the burgeoning public theater, whose first permanent playhouse had been erected in London only a decade prior. A similar dynamic interfacing between work and play is at the conceptual and even phenomenological heart of the theater, which became embroiled in a century-long debate in which antitheatrical detractors condemned the theater as a den of idleness that kept people from their regular labors—even as playing had itself become a form of remunerative work for actors, acrobats, clowns, and other performers. As Andrew Gurr puts it, professional actors' "insistence on being paid for their work of 'play' made them dangerous as well as seductive," such that "[e]ven their place in society was anomalous, since they functioned as workers in time of carnival."[19] Situated at an ambiguous crossroads between vagabondage, royal patronage, and early capitalist financial practice, the early modern English theatre was a liminal

[19] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 9, 11. See also Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981).

and contested site for making sense of the ways social relations were adjusting to rapid changes in economic life, including in the nature and scale of production. Marlowe's short lyric poem turns, perhaps with a wink, to the countryside and to a limited stock of voices to show how these relations are being refigured even beyond the urban center, but his drama will turn to even more complex interpersonal networks to help parse through the kinds of relational ambiguities "Passionate Shepherd" is interested in. The London theater, given the kind of institution it was, was well-suited to addressing these questions even if its "playing" should be not understood as fully collapsible with the ambivalent play of the shepherd-poet, or indeed with the broader trend in the repatterning of work and play that I have suggested was diffuse in early modern culture.

Indeed, by the time Marlowe's plays began to appear onstage in the late 1580s, the late feudal world of Thomas More had changed considerably. While this book does not assume that capitalism—or, to be more precise, the merchant capitalism of pre-industrial Europe—"happened" in any one time or place, or that it is identifiable with any single economic practice, by the 1580s England had achieved a rather robust commercial economy centered in the rapidly-expanding urban center of London.[20] England was making early aspirational movements toward matching the navigational and colonialist successes of Spain, and it was in the 1580s that the first modern life insurance contracts were drawn up.[21] The English East India Company was founded in 1600, and the New Exchange—sometimes called Britain's Burse, in homage to the famous Burse of Amsterdam—opened less than a decade later. My object here is not to rehearse this history in detail, but to examine the ways these developments were felt and experienced as they have come

[20] Jean-Christophe Agnew emphasizes "the intensity of commodity circulation" in the so-called long sixteenth century, or the period lasting from roughly 1550-1650 (*Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986], 39).

[21] See H.E. Raynes, *A History of British Insurance* (London: Pitman and Sons, 1948); Geoffrey Clark, *Betting on Lives: The Culture of Life Insurance in England, 1695-1775* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1999); and Guido Rossi, *Insurance in Elizabethan England: The London Code* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016).

down to us in imaginative writing. As John Wheeler observes in *A Treatise of Commerce* (1601), "all that a man worketh with his hand, or discourseth in his spirit, is nothing els but merchandise"—a bit of hyperbole that nonetheless suggests the extent to which commerce, even by the turn of the seventeenth century, was felt as totalizing.[22] There is, certainly, a way in which elements of the local urban economy mimicked or interlocked with those of long-distance mercantile trade, and vice versa, in a kind of web of commercializing logic. The East India Company, for instance, was organized on the joint-stock principles already in use by some theatrical companies, such as the Lord Chamberlain's Men.[23]

These changes shaped the contexts in which writing and other forms of imaginative output occurred, and shaped as well the tastes of the audiences that dramatists were writing for. If More wrote mainly for an elite coterie of Latinate humanists, Marlowe wrote vernacular drama for a London public that included not only the so-called middling sort but also aristocratic visitors and the poor. Nonetheless, the humanist spirit of *serio ludere* or "serious play" survived, if in very new shape, in the public theater, which invited audiences to respond to the conditions and purposes of playing by making play the instrument of serious, even tragic, reflection on political, economic, and social life. More's *Utopia* sought mainly to redirect the erotic or libidinal energies of play into a productive and even disciplinary regime of labor, reserving its potentially riotous surpluses for those, like himself, who could be trusted to handle them profitably in the form of authorship. For Marlowe and his fellow dramatists, however, play could not be sublimated so readily, since play

[22] John Wheeler, *A Treatise of Commerce*, ed. George B. Hotchkiss (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1931), 7.
[23] Douglas Bruster argues that the construction of the Globe Theatre (along with a new Blackfriars and Fortune) in 1599, the chartering in 1600 of the East India Company, and the emergence in 1609 of the New Exchange should be understood as "part of a larger historical trajectory" of the dawning of "institutionalized capitalism" (*Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992], 4). Gurr identifies a democratic sharer system and an autocratic impresario system as the twin poles of an organizational scale along which early modern playing companies structured themselves; see *The Shakespearian Playing Companies*, 8-9. For a recent treatment of the novelty of the joint-stock organizational model for the circuits of global trade, see Ron Harris, *Going the Distance: Eurasian Trade and the Rise of the Business Corporation, 1400-1700* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2020).

was itself the visible and sensuous condition of their authorial production. Live theater is its own kind of invitational mode that invites reflection on relational dynamics in all their visual, auditory, tactile, and even olfactory dimensions. Literally "seeing" relations acted this way contributes new insights to the epistemology of play—play as a way of knowing self and others, of figuring relations as mediated by a material world of things.

In the remainder of this chapter I will be interested in how *Tamburlaine, Pt. 1* (1587) and *The Jew of Malta* (~1590) conceptually extend the erotic craftsmanship of "The Passionate Shepherd" into different forms of political economy. For *Tamburlaine*, the context is Afro-Asiatic war and conquest; for *The Jew of Malta*, of geopolitical conflict in the Mediterranean Sea. These are not plays about trade, much less about early English mercantilism, but they are invested in acts of exchange that clarify relational boundaries and articulate networks of affinity (or, more often, enmity), particularly through the exchange and circulation of objects of value. In *Tamburlaine*, I am interested in how the titular warlord moves from the margins of political economy into its sovereign center; and in *Jew*, in how Barabas negotiates his ethnic and religious marginality with his status as the wealthiest man in Malta, a position that puts him directly in the crossfire of Maltese and Ottoman conflict. In both, I am interested in how *play* emerges as the mode of negotiation that enables both these marginalized figures to manipulate their politico-economic standing among their rivals, a mode that *Jew* identifies with the figure of Machiavelli.

II. APOCALYPSE OF WIT IN *TAMBURLAINE, PT. 1*

When Tamburlaine the Great, from Marlowe's earliest public stage play, first appears on scene, he is reassuring his captive Zenocrate, daughter of the Soldan of Egypt, that he is not the lowly shepherd he appears to be. "And these that seem but silly country swains," he tells her,

gesturing to his men, "May have the leading of so great an host / As with their weight shall make the mountains quake."[24] Throughout the play Tamburlaine must make good on his claim, spoken to Zenocrate just a few lines earlier, that "I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove, / And yet a shepherd by my parentage" (1.2.34-35). His claim is an act of prolepsis through which a transcendent self will be retroactively revealed through future "deeds," just as Marlowe's passionate shepherd is anxious to "prove" his belonging to the pastoral scene through his ability to engage in the right kinds of industry. As Bryan Lowrance argues, in the *Tamburlaine* plays Marlowe makes a rhetorical gesture "in which the heroic sovereignty of the present is established vis-à-vis the future projections of imagination. He introduces a strategy in which sovereignty is established through the prolepsis of wit."[25] In the overcoming of an otherwise limiting "parentage," Tamburlaine's claim is also doing the work of analepsis as deed looks not just forward toward lordship but also backward to shepherding; in confirming his lordship, Tamburlaine's deed must also be interpreted through and against a limiting genealogical and occupational past. The repetitive structure of the play, in which Tamburlaine triumphs over one king after the next, thus owes to an apocalyptic logic (from Gk. ἀπό + καλύπτω, an "uncovering" or revelation) wherein Tamburlaine must continually reveal, to his misbelieving rivals, who he has been all along through revelatory deed. His final rival, Bajazeth, the Emperor of Turkey, finally reaches such a moment of *anagnorisis* about Tamburlaine's identity after having been conquered and imprisoned by him. Though he had repeatedly dismissed Tamburlaine as a "villain" (5.1.268), "tyrant" (4.2.7, 4.4.22, 4.4.100), and "usurpe[r]" (4.2.57), Bajazeth finally submits, telling his wife:

> Ah, fair Zabina, we may curse his power,

[24] Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, The First Part*, in *Tamburlaine the Great: Parts I and II*, ed. John D. Jump (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1967), act 1, scene 2, lines 47-49. Hereafter cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

[25] Bryan Lowrance, "Marlowe's Wit: Power, Language, and the Literary in *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*," *Modern Philology* 111.4 (2014): 724.

> The heavens may frown, the earth for anger quake,
> But such a star hath influence in his sword
> As rules the skies and countermands the gods.
> (5.1.229-32)

He then brains himself on his cage—the emotional climax of the play, as I read it, his words to Zabina ringing with an apocalyptic force made all the starker by this act of violent suicide. Tamburlaine, in a moment of *parousia*, has finally appeared to Bajazeth as what he is: not a lawless and cruel pretender, but a ruler by cosmic ordinance.[26]

War, not trade, is the environment in which Tamburlaine's apocalyptic unveilings take place, but as the skepticism about his military prowess in light of his pastoral birth shows, Tamburlaine has from the beginning been coded by his princely rivals as a particular kind of actor at the margins of political economy: a "thief," the word used to describe Tamburlaine and his army twelve times throughout the play. They are also derided as "slaves" six times, five times as "barbarous," and twice as "vagabonds." The Persian Cosroe, pretender to his brother's throne, will not let Menaphon pursue Tamburlaine because "[a] greater task / Fits Menaphon than warring with a thief" (1.1.87-88); and the Soldan of Egypt, warned by his messengers in the direst terms of Tamburlaine's strength, dismisses him as a "[m]erciless villain, peasant ignorant / Of lawful arms or martial discipline! / Pillage and murder are his usual trades. / The slave usurps the glorious name of war" (4.1.64-67). The Soldan draws here from a stock of imbricated though not interchangeable social categories—thief, peasant, murderer, slave, vagabond—whose collapsed distinctions are nonetheless meant to accentuate Tamburlaine's supposed unruliness, barbarity, and lust for gold. If Tamburlaine is a thief, then he is no world-conqueror; and even as his massive armies begin

[26] For another reading of apocalypse in *Tamburlaine*, see Richard F. Hardin, "Apocalypse Then: *Tamburlaine* and the Pleasures of Religious Fear," *Baylor Journal of Theatre and Performance* 3.2 (2006): 31-41. Hardin focuses on apocalypse in its eschatological sense rather than as unveiling or revelation. For a productive recent discussion of *anagnorisis*, see Patrick Gray, "Shakespeare versus Aristotle: *Anagnorisis*, Repentance, and Acknowledgment," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 49.1 (2019): 85-111.

conquering Asia, he is still only a thief. In one particularly telling scene, a spy reports that Tamburlaine's army "far exceeds the king's" (2.2.41-42), whereupon Meander, acting as general for the incompetent Persian king Mycetes, decides that

> to entrap these thieves
> That live confounded in disordered troops,
> If wealth or riches may prevail with them,
> We have our camels laden all with gold,
> Which you that be but common soldiers
> Shall fling in every corner of the field,
> And, while the base-born Tartars take it up,
> You, fighting more for honor than for gold,
> Shall massacre those greedy-minded slaves;
> And, when their scattered army is subdu'd
> And you march on their slaughtered carcasses,
> Share equally the gold that bought their lives
> And live like gentlemen in Persia.
>
> (2.2.59-71)

The strategy is almost comic in its portrait of Tamburlaine's massive army relinquishing the battle to go on a treasure hunt, but Meander seems to be entirely serious. Having already decided that Tamburlaine's army is "void of martial discipline…more regarding gain than victory" (2.2.44-46), Meander's strategy suggests that tactical decision-making in war operates not under its own endogenous rules, but under the exogenous assumptions of political economy. Tamburlaine can be expected not only to act as a thief but to have the "greedy mind" that racially belongs to a "base-born Tartar" and shepherd, whose actions in war thus become legible as motivated by base economic gain rather than by the martial glory or victory that motivates the Persians. The irony of the scheme, of course, is that this mockery of the "greedy-minded" Tartars itself depends upon a fantasy to "live like gentlemen" off the very gold used to lure them into the field of battle. For Meander, however, theirs is not "disordered" thievery but an act of purchase, interpretable as such by the principles of war against an inferior and unfit enemy. It is notable, in this regard, that in *Tamburlaine, Pt. 2* such accusations of thievery disappear almost entirely; only in extremity, after

spectacular displays of military power, does it prove an untenable thing to continue to claim about Tamburlaine.

This tethering of his pastoral origins to a limited stock of abilities, motivations, and affects is what Tamburlaine must prove himself against by "deed"—thus his relentless drive toward "the sweet fruition of an earthly crown" (2.7.29). Just as the shepherd-poet seeks to induct the nymph into the pastoral world by making her the kinds of things that shepherds make, so too does Tamburlaine seek to project himself out of the pastoral world by warring as the Eastern monarchs wage war. Such an approach may appear decidedly less playful than what we encountered in the erotic economy of "The Passionate Shepherd," but Tamburlaine's verbal exchanges with his rivals suggest otherwise. Witness, for example, the moves he makes in his quips with Mycetes, who tries to hide his crown in a hole in the earth at the scene of battle between his and Tamburlaine's armies:

> TAMBURLAINE: Is this your crown?
> MYCETES: Ay, didst thou ever see a fairer?
> TAMBURLAINE: You will not sell it, will ye?
> MYCETES: Such another word, and I will have thee executed.
> Come, give it me.
> TAMBURLAINE: No, I took it prisoner.
> MYCETES: You lie, I gave it you.
> TAMBURLAINE: Then 'tis mine.
> MYCETES: No, I mean I let you keep it.
> TAMBURLAINE: Well, I mean you shall have it again.
> Here, take it for awhile; I lend it thee
> Till I may see thee hemm'd with armed men.
> Then shalt thou see me pull it from thy head.
> Thou art no match for mighty Tamburlaine. *[Exit]*
> MYCETES: O gods, is this Tamburlaine the thief?
> I marvel much he stole it not away.
> *Sound trumpets to the battle, and he runs in.*
> (2.4.26-41)

Amusing himself at the expense of "witless" Mycetes, Tamburlaine challenges him to "speak but three wise words" (2.4.24) before manipulating the crown and finally declaring Mycetes "no match for mighty Tamburlaine." "Mighty" here denotes intellectual as much as physical power, with

"match" drawing on the language of contest or games to suggest Tamburlaine's ludic investment in his own displays of prowess; in the following scene he promises his generals that they "shalt see the Scythian Tamburlaine / Make but a jest to win the Persian crown" (2.5.97-98), and avers that Cosroe was only made king "to make us sport" (l. 101). The "wondrous ease" with which Tamburlaine seems to "attain" the crown (l. 77)—which in the scene with Mycetes functions at once as emblem of kingly power and as a kind of toy—suggests a playful felicity in Tamburlaine's pursuit of his earthly crown, a jocularity that makes itself felt even earlier in the play when Tamburlaine asks his soldiers, confronted with the richly-clad Persian army: "[S]hall we fight courageously with them? / Or look you I should play the orator?" (1.2.128-29).

What I mean to emphasize here is that Tamburlaine's ludism makes its own kind of economic gesture, one which demonstrates mastery over the logics of exchange in someone dismissed as a thief and vagabond. Tamburlaine the barbarian is supposed to know only the unidirectionality of spoil and theft, not the more subtle economic logics of give-and-take. Tamburlaine's verbal wit should be read, then, as Marc Shell has read metaphorization—as an act of "exchanging meanings," a bid that reveals the economic logic at the heart of language itself.[27] It is precisely through the playfulness of their exchange that Mycetes experiences his own partial *anagnorisis* as he questions the appellation of thief so ubiquitously applied to Tamburlaine. A thief would have simply stolen the crown; that Tamburlaine instead uses the occasion of crown-grabbing to enter a temporary, ludic space of metaphor ("I took it prisoner") before handing it back means that he is a different kind of actor than he has been credited for, as Mycetes begins to realize. Nonetheless, the language of thievery is so pervasive in the play that it continues to find its way even into the critical literature on this scene. "The Scythian usurper, Tamburlaine," writes one

[27] Marc Shell, *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982), 3.

critic, "treats the crown as a material emblem of authority that can be stolen and exchanged at will."[28] While he does reject Christian or Islamic formulations of rule by divine right, arrogating to himself the ability to "turn Fortune's wheel" (5.1.189), this Tamburlaine still sees tremendous power invested in the crown. Punning both on Mycetes' use of "fair" and on the meaning of "crown" as "coin," he mocks the notion that the crown is reducible to a mere good of exchange. Exchange, instead, enters the domain of language, where Tamburlaine's wordplay imparts not just competence but a sense of radical transcendence and sovereignty; mastering the verbal play with Mycetes means also mastering the crown which was always his to begin with, in another moment of proleptic wit. As the play progresses and his dominion swells, Tamburlaine's metaphors become much more cruel—"Bring out my footstool," he says of the caged Bajazeth (4.2.1)—but here, with the crown as object of mediation and no physical harm done to Mycetes, the act of play proves suitable to revealing what kind of actor Tamburlaine really is.[29] He moves from the margins of political economy into its center, a powerful sovereign with the ability to "lend" and to manipulate exchange in his own favor.

The abiding critical emphasis on language in *Tamburlaine*—on the "high astounding terms" with which Tamburlaine threatens the world in the play's prologue (l. 5)—has partly obscured the extent to which the action of the play turns on these questions, which are (if mostly implicitly) rooted in problems of political economy.[30] While he is a master rhetorician, Tamburlaine prefers deeds to mere words: "Tush, Turks are full of brags / And menace more than they can well perform," he tells the Basso (3.3.3-4). His army, too, rejects speechifying for the

[28] C.K. Preedy, "(De)Valuing the Crown in *Tamburlaine*, *Dido Queen of Carthage*, and *Edward II*," *SEL* 54.2 (2014): 263.
[29] For more on Tamburlaine's escalating extremism and cruelty, see Kateryna A. R. Schray, "'Is This Your Crown?': Conquest and Coronation in *Tamburlaine I*, Act 2 Scene 4," *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 68 (2005): 19-26.
[30] The interest in *Tamburlaine*'s (and Marlowe's) language stretches back to Harry Levin's definitive *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952).

unsubtleties of active violence: to Tamburlaine's seemingly tongue-in-cheek offer to "play the orator," Techelles responds, "Our swords shall play the orators for us" (1.2.132). As Tamburlaine's victories accumulate, however, language gets drawn into the skepticism about his ability to exercise princely *virtù*. Zenocrate, by now wooed by her captor, must disabuse the Median lord Agydas of the notion that Tamburlaine, "[o]nly dispos'd to martial stratagems," is incapable of "amorous discourse" (3.2.41-44). "His talk," she affirms, is "much sweeter than the Muses' song" (l. 50). For Agydas, Tamburlaine's martial masculinity compromises his ability to love—to enter, in a self-controlled way, into the domain of the feminine—as a well-rounded and temperate sovereign ought to do; he imagines that Tamburlaine "[w]ill rattle forth his facts of war and blood, / Too harsh a subject for your dainty ears" (ll. 45-46). As Amanda Bailey and Roze Hentschell argue, in early modernity "[t]he yoking of moderation and proper masculinity meant that vicious behavior, associated with various forms of excess, was by definition a challenge to and potentially a departure from manhood."[31] Tamburlaine's bellicosity compromises the tempered masculinity expected of a sovereign, placing him beyond the Aristotelian mean as ethical (*aristos*) but also as aristocratic ideal. At stake here is not only Tamburlaine's masculinity but also his legibility as a class actor: he "keeps you from the honors of a queen," Agydas tells Zenocrate (l. 28), which she disputes: "The entertainment we have had of him / Is far from villainy or servitude, / And might in noble minds be counted princely" (ll. 37-39). At first discredited as a thief, as someone for whom war is mere opportunity to pillage and collect spoil, Tamburlaine is now discredited as *too* warlike, as someone whose hypermasculinity will bar him from the erotic economy, rooted largely in the "dainty" use of language, through which one proves oneself a lord rather than a mere soldier.

[31] Amanda Bailey and Roze Hentschell, "Introduction: Gendered Geographies of Vice," in *Masculinity and the Metropolis of Vice, 1550-1650*, ed. Bailey and Hentschell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

Both acts of discrediting cast Tamburlaine as a figure of excess, as unpracticed in the normative values of both warcraft and statecraft and thus as culturally and politically marginal.

While the dynamics of this particular exchange have little in them of the economic, I turn to this scene as another example of the way Tamburlaine's legibility is always being compromised by an apparent disjunction between his status (his origins, his genealogy, his race, his class markers) and his ability (what he is actually doing), leaving others to negotiate who Tamburlaine is. Zenocrate's defense of him—that his actions are "far from villainy or servitude"—reinforces that this negotiation centers on the problematics of class, and thus of politico-economic relations. Indeed, the question—who is Tamburlaine?—is not the ontological question it may at first seem, but a social one: who is Tamburlaine *in relation to* us? His legibility is only a problem for those in the play who adhere to the circular logic whereby status proves ability and ability proves status. For Tamburlaine himself, however, the gaps between these are a space of apocalyptic play: indeterminacy is the zone of "sport" (2.5.101), where ability can be demonstrated all the more dazzlingly because it is productive of something new. "The action," as Sarah Ahmed puts it, "searches for identity as the mark of attainment"; so, for example, "the writer 'becomes' a writer through writing."[32] As Hannah Arendt formulates it, "without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character and becomes one form of achievement among others."[33] The whole thrust of *Tamburlaine, Pt. 1*, with its apocalyptic reveals, is the disclosure of the agent in the act, but this disclosure isn't attained easily since the same act can be interpreted in more than one way by more than one observer. Thus the need for repetition, which eventuates into a meaning that is no longer ambiguous, as Bajazeth tragically learns.

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[32] Sarah Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2010), 246.
[33] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), 180.

In Marlowe's oeuvre, both poetic and dramatic, the future appears as an unfolding present where a social self in competitive rivalry with others must continually demonstrate its worth. It is precisely through these rivalries that relationships are clarified, as the crown-exchange scene with Mycetes suggests. In *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe will bring these concerns with relational economy into the rich mercantile networks of the Mediterranean, where *Tamburlaine*'s political economies of war and "The Passionate Shepherd's" erotics of craftsmanship meet in the complex geopolitical entanglements of war, tribute, trade, slavery, and "profession."

III. COUNTERFEIT PROFESSIONS IN *THE JEW OF MALTA*

In *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*, possibly Marlowe's next play after *Tamburlaine*, we encounter not a linear path of seemingly preordained conquest but a maze of entangled relations that are continually in flux. In Marlowe's England "Malta was regarded as a liminal space, where a broad cross-section of culture, religions, and nationalities mingled and struggled for domination," as Virginia Mason Vaughan writes.[34] In this Mediterranean melting pot, the opportunism in social, political, and economic relations is effectively laid bare—hence the prologue's introduction of Machevil as a kind of tutelary spirit for the play. "[G]race him as he deserves," this Machevil implores his playhouse audience on behalf of the play's title Jew, Barabas, "And let him not be entertained the worse / Because he favors me."[35] Knowing that his audience is predisposed to mistrusting him, Machevil means to protect Barabas even as he (wittingly or unwittingly) has already made Barabas guilty by association; and, especially in this

[34] Virginia Mason Vaughan, "The Maltese Factor: The Poetics of Place in *The Jew of Malta* and *The Knight of Malta*," in *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion*, ed. Jyotsna G. Singh (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 341.
[35] Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1978), prologue, lines 33-35. Hereafter cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

context, the injunction to "grace him as he deserves" feels perhaps more threatening than protective. By opening the play with Machiavel, Marlowe has rather ingeniously thrown his audience into the oversaturated political fray of Maltese life, where everyone is already the enemy of someone else. This Machevil sets the tone for a play that is labeled a tragedy but usually feels much closer to black comedy, its scenes of hyperbolic yet blithely-committed treachery and violence giving the play an extravagance and a tonal indeterminacy seldom felt even in revenge tragedy or in the undulations of tragicomedy.

But while Machevil spends much of the prologue defending the Draconian politics of force and violence with which Niccolò Machiavelli was associated (fairly or not) in early modern England, his initial address to his audience is decidedly more jocund:

> Albeit the world think Machevil is dead,
> Yet was his soul but flown beyond the Alps;
> And now the Guise is dead is come from France,
> To view this land and frolic with his friends.
> (prol.1-4)[36]

"Frolic"—the word used in *Edward II* to describe the king's dalliance with his minion, Gaveston—connotes the spirit not of sinister power-grabbing but of companionate play. And yet, paired with the topical reference to the death of the Duke of Guise (assassinated in 1588), who played a role in the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day massacre (the subject of Marlowe's later play *The Massacre at Paris* [1593]), the word does carry a sinister resonance. Now departed from the body of the Guise, who might Machevil be frolicking with here in England? He goes on to profess that "I count religion but a childish toy" (prol.14), which is not the wholesale dismissal it may at first

[36] For the reception of Machiavelli in England, see Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation, 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 1964); Bawcutt, "Machiavelli and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*," *Renaissance Drama* New Series, vol. 3 (1970): 3-49; Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), esp. 93-131; and, for a manuscript history, Alessandra Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of "The Prince"* (London: Routledge, 2009).

seem but rather a reimagining of religion's role in political life through the metaphorics of play. While the line is clearly responding to injunctions in *The Prince* that it is more important for the prince to have the appearance of religiosity than to be religious in fact, this opportunistic wielding of religion (the thing that makes it a "toy") actually turns the descriptor "childish" onto the opportunist, since it is he that plays or toys with religion in the absence of sincere belief. Thus, Machevil again portrays himself as a player, as someone for whom political machinations are a kind of pleasurable game. This is a seemingly intentional departure from the historic Machiavelli, who argued that the prince should concern himself only with war and criticized liberal princes for the vice of *suntuosità* or extravagance.[37]

I acknowledge the ludic in these lines not to absolve Marlowe's Machevil (or his protégé, Barabas) of guilt, but to shed light on the knottiness at the heart of the way the play represents interpersonal relations. There is something almost sportive in the way that its many schemers exercise their Machiavellianism, felt in the instructions Barabas gives to his Thracian slave Ithamore to "smile when the Christians moan" (2.3.174); or in Barabas's whimsical observation, "how sweet the bells ring," after he has just poisoned an entire convent of nuns (4.1.2); or in his wry comment—"What, all alone?"—after he wakes from being thrown over the city walls and left for dead (5.1.61). The gleeful sadism that characterizes Barabas's attitude throughout the play might be read as psychopathic, but it also reflects the pressure-cooker situation in Malta, where "the will to profit stands beside, if not above, the will to power," as Emily Bartels puts it.[38] Machevil states that his purpose is to "present the tragedy of a Jew, / Who smiles to see how full

[37] See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, Second Edition*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019), chs. XIV ("How a Ruler Should Act Concerning Military Matters") and XVI ("Liberality and Parsimony"). For more on Machiavelli and theatricality, see Arata Ide, "*The Jew of Malta* and the Diabolic Power of Theatrics in the 1580s," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 46.2 (2006): 257-79.
[38] Emily C. Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 83.

his bags are crammed, / Which money was not got without my means" (ll. 30-32)—a rapid pivot (from "tragedy" to "smiles," and from tragedy's traditional concern with cosmic fate to a more worldly concern with economic gain) that I take to be characteristic both of this play's aesthetic force and of its economic vision.[39] Indeed, these lines suggest that the "tragedy" of the play has something to do with the hazards of economic life, located racially in the figure of the usurious Jew though not fully identifiable with him as the play's increasingly complex maze of relations unfolds. And yet the tragic vision is ambivalent, marked with the smiles of Barabas and the frolicking of Machiavel. Its social relations (and, particularly, its moneyed relations) are marked by a tendency toward play, itself ambiguously defined—a play that is productive of wealth, in ways that are often mysterious and yet expose and clarify the opportunistic social relations that mediate the circulation of wealth.

Stephen Greenblatt's important treatment of Marlowe's "absolute play" sees in *The Jew of Malta* quite the opposite of what I describe here. Greenblatt's Barabas, who is produced by the Christian society that hates him and is thus forced merely to "respon[d] to the initiatives of others," is in the end deindividualized, effaced, and annihilated, his absolute play teetering "on the brink of an abyss," anarchical and self-defeating in its vengefulness and aggression.[40] Without ignoring the startling violence in Barabas's play, what I mean to emphasize is that its aggressiveness does however permit a certain creative outpouring, if a deeply ambivalent one—destructive to others, certainly, but productive of an interior self that Barabas is always enlisting against his rivals: "No, I will live: nor loathe I this my life…I'll rouse my senses, and awake myself" (1.2.266-69). For David Thurn, Barabas "embod[ies] at the outset a principle of surplus and unrestricted

[39] As Arthur Lindley remarks of these lines, "we need to retain a sense of the disorientation that such phrasing is calculated to produce" ("The Unbeing of the Overreacher: Proteanism and the Marlovian Hero," *The Modern Language Review* 84.1 [1989]: 1.)
[40] Stephen Greenblatt, "Marlowe, Marx, and Anti-Semitism," *Critical Inquiry* 5.2 (1978): 299, 305.

expenditure," a bacchanalia of sometimes chaotic though always self-promoting energy.[41] Like Thurn, I am interested in how these dazzling surpluses reflect the particular economic conditions of late-sixteenth-century political economy. "Unlike the mechanisms of capital in the late modern era, which permit it to proliferate, annex, and expand at an increasing rate," Thurn writes, "merchant's capital remains closely linked in the period to a legal and political monopoly which safeguards traditional territorial privileges."[42] In the play this monopoly belongs to Malta's Christian governor, Ferneze, who extorts Barabas's wealth to pay an overdue tribute to the Ottoman emperor and thus sets off the chain of events that structure the remainder of the play. Its circuits of monetary exchange are, then, shaped by the whims and decrees of authoritative power—but not exclusively. It is precisely through his creative play that Barabas finds new, albeit illicit, means of re-enriching himself after the expropriation of his wealth, and of moving through the contradictory circuits of Maltese life. He ultimately fails—thus "the tragedy of a Jew"—but this failure should not underwrite the playful autonomy he reserves to himself through most of the play.

We have thus traversed the spheres of sovereignty and dominion in *Tamburlaine* to enter the risky world of mercantilism, where one avenue toward social recognition is through the ability to (over)accumulate. Everyone in Malta seems to know Barabas and his business, even down to the officers at the slave market: "Here comes the Jew; had not his goods been seized, / He'd give us present money for them all," one of them remarks (2.3.5-6). This wealth is amassed through the modal resources of wiliness and craftiness, the relational posturing of games, rather than through work as traditionally understood. Indeed, the means through which Barabas enacts his vengeful, money-grubbing schemes are, time and again, drawn from the resources of theater. He partially

[41] David H. Thurn, "Economic and Ideological Exchange in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*," *Theatre Journal* 46.2 (1994): 161.
[42] Thurn, 162.

recovers the wealth extorted from him by Governor Ferneze by sending his daughter, Abigail, to retrieve gold hidden beneath the floorboards of his house. But when she tells him that their home has been converted into a nunnery, he instructs her in how to dissemble as a would-be nun, "for in extremity / We ought to make bar of no policy" (1.2.272-73); and, "[a] counterfeit profession is better / Than unseen hypocrisy" (ll. 292-93). The coining metaphor suggests the extent to which Barabas understands his economic scheming as a fundamentally theatrical endeavor. Later, proudly relating his own criminal autobiography to Ithamore (the enslaved man he purchases at market), Barabas boasts that

> in the wars 'twixt France and Germany,
> Under pretense of helping Charles the Fifth,
> [I] slew friend and enemy with my stratagems.
> Then after that I was an usurer,
> And with extorting, cozening, forfeiting,
> And tricks belonging unto brokery,
> I filled the jails with bankrupts in a year[.]
> …….
> But mark how I am blest for plaguing them:
> I have as much coin as will buy the town!
> (2.3.189-202)

Pulled from Middle French, the earliest written appearance of "stratagem" comes from Thomas Elyot's dictionary, which in 1538 defines "stratagema" as "a polycie or wyse councille in warres."[43] By the 1580s, however, the word had shed this purely martial context and could figure, for example, erotic pursuits: there is an "amorous stratageme" in Anthony Munday's *Palmendos* (1589), and *The Spanish Tragedy*'s Lorenzo claims to have "found a strategeme, / To sound the bottome of this doubtfull theame" (Balthazar's lovesickness over Bel-Imperia).[44] Barabas's

[43] Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Dictionary of syr Thomas Eliot knight* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1538), accessed via Early English Books Online (EEBO).
[44] Anthony Munday, *The honorable, pleasant and rare conceited historie of Palmendos…Translated out of French by A.M.* (London: Printed by I.C. for Simon Watersonne, 1589), ch. XVIII, accessed via EEBO; Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish tragedie containing the lamentable end of Don Horatio, and Bel-imperia: with the pittifull death of olde Hieronimo* (London: Printed by Edward Allde for Edward White, 1592), act 2, scene 1, accessed via EEBO. Raphael Holinshed uses the word often in his *Chronicles*, and John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* speaks of a "stratagem or

catalogue of crime emphasizes a certain homology between the gamesmanship of war, where the "stratagem" is the double-crossing of both "friend and enemy," and the gamesmanship possible in an economy where one can get rich off the "tricks" of financial "brokery." They are all part of a Machiavellian policy where a marginal position of "extremity" justifies any amount of treachery, since everyone is in competition with everyone else.[45] Indeed, even this exchange with Ithamore happens in a competitive spirit as Barabas then demands of him, "But tell me now, how hast *thou* spent *thy* time?" (l. 203, emphasis mine), vetting him to make sure he will be just as hostile to their Christian rivals. Later, when the two of them have strangled Friar Bernardine, Ithamore suggests that they stand the corpse up and "let him lean upon his staff," quipping, "excellent, he stands as if he were begging of bacon" (4.1.154-55)—a gruesome bit of theater meant to pin the blame for the murder on Friar Jacomo, who comes along and strikes the dead friar for not responding to him (4.1.173, SD). Only a few scenes later, Barabas, disguised as a French musician, will poison Ithamore for sending him extortionary letters—another use of the instruments of theater ("Must tuna my lute for sound, twang, twang, first" [4.4.30]). There is an almost compulsive way in which Barabas turns to play to solve relational problems, particularly where he feels his finances under threat by a rival.

Though he is at pains to prove his villainous credentials to Ithamore, the sheer accumulation of odd jobs through which Barabas eventually earns enough "coin as will buy the town" raises a question about what it is that he actually *does*, the roles he plays in the rhythms of

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subtile deuise" involving disguise. Foxe elsewhere uses the rich phrases "subtile sleight and craftie conueiance" and "subtile of witte"; see Foxe, *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church with an vniuersall history of the same* (London: John Daye, 1583), accessed via EEBO.

[45] Howard S. Babb reads "policy" as a double entendre signifying, throughout the play, both a government's official position and actions taken for private profit, arguing that Barabas is just as hypocritical as his Christian counterparts in his opportunistic conflation of these meanings. See Babb, "Policy in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*," *ELH* 24.2 (1957): 85-94. For a history of the word's positive, negative, and Machiavellian valences in the sixteenth century, see Bawcutt, "'Policy,' Machiavellianism, and the Earlier Tudor Drama," *English Literary Renaissance* 1.3 (1971): 195-209.

the Maltese economy. It is no accident that the play brings a Jew into the center of this question. Given special dispensation to practice usury, otherwise prohibited to Christians by the Church until the 1545 "Act Against Usurie" permitted charging interest up to ten percent, the Jewish body remained the locus of disputes around the justice of profiting without doing diligent labor. Gerard de Malynes more or less spoke for the era when he averred that money lent "without hazard, but vpon securitie, should pay no profit."[46] Francis Bacon, more willing to consider both the "commodities" and "discommodities" of the practice, characterized a common complaint thus: "The usurer breaketh the first law, that was made for mankind after the fall, which was, *in sudore vultus tui comedes panem tuum* [by the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread]; not, *in sudore vultus alieni* [by the sweat of another]."[47] The Church, for its part, condemned usury variously in the languages of idleness, blasphemy, and perversion, a deviant kind of "breed[ing]" in which humanmade coinage does the reproductive work properly belonging to nature; indeed, to loan money at profit causes "*Money* to beget *Money*," which "is against Nature," as Bacon summarizes another complaint.[48] Usury itself—and, through it, Jewishness—thus stood at the center of early modern debates about financial practice, and about what counted as work in this context.

Some critics have argued that Barabas is not in fact a usurer, since when the play opens we see him engaged in "legitimate" merchant trading, not in lending at interest.[49] However, it is important that he brags several times about being a usurer in his past, charging loans at the comically exorbitant rate of 100 percent interest (see 4.1.55). On how to characterize his labor,

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[46] Gerard de Malynes, *Consuetudo, vel lex mercatoria, or The ancient law-merchant* (London: 1622), 93.
[47] Francis Bacon, "Of usurie," in *Sir Francis Bacon: The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. M. Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 125. Translations are my own.
[48] Bacon, 125.
[49] See, for example, Bradley Ryner, "The Usurer's Theatrical Body: Refiguring Profit in *The Jew of Malta* and *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*," in *Early Modern Drama in Performance: Essays in Honor of Lois Potter*, ed. Darlene Farabee, Mark Netzloff, and Ryner (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2015), 25-34. Greenblatt writes that "Barabas is not primarily a usurer…but a great merchant, sending his argosies around the world exactly as Shakespeare's much-loved Antonio does" (296).

Lisa Jardine writes that the play produces "a regular pattern of fascination for Barabas's ability to generate wealth with apparent effortlessness," an observation confirmed in Governor Ferneze's blithe justification for expropriating his wealth to pay the Ottoman tribute: "From naught at first thou cam'st to little wealth; / From little unto more, from more to most" (1.2.109-10)—implying that he will be able to grow his wealth again.[50] And indeed, in spite of this extortion, Barabas emerges midway through act 2 "as wealthy as I was," with "a house / As great and fair as is the governor's" (2.3.11-14). This newly-restored Barabas is able to confidently enter the Maltese slave market, where "everyone's price is written on his back" (2.3.3), and purchase Ithamore for a hundred crowns—though apart from the reserved gold hidden beneath the floorboards, it's unclear where this new wealth came from. The question, then, might be framed: what exactly is Barabas's profession?

I pull this word from the play itself, where "profession" appears several times in the first couple acts and functions as a double or sometimes triple entendre. It signifies religious confession, or the profession of faith; occupation or trade, a meaning it seems to have acquired in the sixteenth century; and, finally, a more ambiguous third meaning that denotes something like the social function or role through which a person becomes socially legible, informed by but also not quite synonymous with their trade—something akin to Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the habitus.[51] We've seen the term already in Barabas's prodding of Abigail to adopt a "counterfeit profession."[52] Earlier in the play, expounding on the hypocrisy of Christians, he declares that he can "see no fruits in all their faith, / But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride, / Which methinks fits not their

[50] Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London: Routledge, 1996), 102.
[51] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977).
[52] For a history of the religio-political landscape of "false Jews and counterfeit Christians" in England, see James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996), 13-42.

profession" (1.1.120-22). Nor is Barabas the only person to use the term. As he protests the seizure of his wealth by the state, Ferneze chides him: "Sham'st thou not thus to justify thyself / As if we knew not thy profession?" (1.2.123-24). Here we have the ambiguous third meaning, since it is not immediately clear what Ferneze means to shame Barabas for. Is it usury? Political intrigue of some kind, or Barabas's role in the wars? Simply existing as a Jew, belonging to a group that had long been extorted in this way by cash-strapped governments? It remains unstated, and Ferneze likely has more than one thing in mind. On the use of this term in the play, Lara Bovilsky posits that "Barabas's Jewish 'profession' link[s] *what he does* to *what he is*," situating him within an act/identity nexus where a particular kind of work (say, usury) is always feeding into a racialized identity (Jewishness) and vice versa, as we also saw in the allegations of Tamburlaine's "thievery."[53] This means that Barabas does not even need to do anything to be conceived as belonging to a particular "profession" (however ill-defined), even as the play shows him engaging in so many kinds of "profession" that the term virtually loses its meaning.

This is not to suggest, however, that Barabas becomes illegible; rather, I mean to argue that his negotiation of multiple professions, enabled in part by the flexible ways in which the word is bandied about by himself and others, helpfully contextualizes what I mean by his Machiavellian play. It is through his sense that a profession can be counterfeited, imitated, overdetermined, and discarded that Barabas shows the utility of protean play for political and economic life. He knows how to take advantage of the gaps in others' understanding of what it is that he does, as he jocularly demonstrates when confronted by Friars Bernardine and Jacomo:

> BERNARDINE: Barabas, thou hast—
> JACOMO: Ay, that thou hast—
> BARABAS: True, I have money; what though I have?
> BERNARDINE: Thou art a—

[53] Lara Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008), 74, emphasis original.

JACOMO: Ay, that thou art, a—
BARABAS: What needs all this? I know I am a Jew.
BERNARDINE: Thy daughter—
JACOMO: Ay, thy daughter—
BARABAS: O speak not of her, then I die with grief.
BERNARDINE: Remember that—
JACOMO: Ay, remember that—
BERNARDINE: Thou hast committed—
BARABAS: Fornication?
But that was in another country:
And besides, the wench is dead.
(4.1.28-42)

What I want to emphasize is not just Barabas's savvy ability to deflect, but also the friars' inability to fully articulate for themselves who Barabas is and what he has done, what charge they are actually bringing against him. The exchange serves a comic function for the scene, but it also gets to the root of the fundamental indeterminacy of Barabas's never-fully-quantifiable "profession." Almost everyone in this play is scheming and opportunistic, but in Barabas we find the self-conscious production of a self that is, as far as possible, radically self-determined in its ability to play through the ambiguities of profession. Edward Gieskes situates the development of secular professions in the experience of being "disembedded…from the premodern order" and "eventually reembedded…in a recognizably modern one," arguing that "professions offer means of self-fashioning not directly linked to traditional hierarchies of rank or of birth"—opening the kind of space for agentic play that I have been identifying in Marlowe's works.[54] Frustrated by his associates' advice to lay low and practice patience after the extortion of his wealth, for example, Barabas articulates the same ambitious futurity we found in *Tamburlaine*:

See the simplicity of these base slaves,
Who for the villains have no wit themselves

[54] Edward Gieskes, *Representing the Professions: Administration, Law, and Theater in Early Modern England* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2006), 13, 14. Peter Berek, in a similar vein, writes that "the theater of the 1590s was obsessed by the possibilities that identity might be willed or chosen and social position achieved by deeds, not birth…Moreover, emerging ideas about fluidity of personal identity are closely associated with new entrepreneurship and social mobility" ("The Jew as Renaissance Man," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51.1 [1998]: 130).

Think me to be a senseless lump of clay
That will with every water wash to dirt!
No, Barabas is born to better chance
And framed of finer mould than common men,
That measure naught but by the present time.
A reaching thought will search his deepest wits,
And cast with cunning for the time to come[.]
(1.2.216-24)

Like Tamburlaine, Barabas both projects himself into a future where, he anticipates, he will be fully revealed, and perceives himself in competition with everyone around him. The turn to "wits" and "cunning," articulated through the ludic verb "cast" (to throw dice, to cast lots), emphasizes the latent logic of play in this act of self-mobilization.

The spirit here is not one of felicitous play, but of competitive rivalry, the disposition Barabas had already brought into the play even before losing his wealth to fund the governor's war: "We [Jews] have scambled up / More wealth by far than those that brag of faith," he avers, naming all the wealthy European Jews he knows (1.1.121-22). This brings us back to the question of play and political economy. For Barabas, wealth was always the measure of success, but he disarticulates the accumulation of wealth from work or labor in an interesting way in the speech that opens the play. Counting up the "paltry silverlings" he was paid for his "Spanish oils and wines of Greece," he denounces the tedium of accounting ("Fie, what a trouble 'tis to count this trash!") and meditates on the apparent ease with which wealth is measured by other nations: "Well fare the Arabians, who so richly pay / The things they traffic for with wedge of gold, / Whereof a man may easily in a day / Tell that which may maintain him all his life" (1.1.5-11). While "the needy groom that never fingered groat / Would make a miracle of thus much coin" (ll. 12-13), Barabas is "loath to labor so" (l. 17); he would rather, like the "wealthy Moor…Receive [his riches] free, and sell them by the weight" (ll. 21-24). If the economic vision here is not quite one of play, it is certainly one that seeks to minimize labor, both in the ways wealth is produced and in the

ways it is accounted for. The pun on "fare"/fair in the description of the Arabians suggests a festivity that is perhaps allowed them in the time not spent counting up heaps of silverlings, and evokes the aesthetic fairness of their gold wedges. In short, the "wit" and "cunning" that Barabas claims for himself as the means through which he will rebuild his expropriated wealth already has an origin here in this fantasy of accumulation without drudgery. His mercantile sensibility is one in which the ability to game the system is understood both as more pleasurable and as more profitable than toiling through it.

The fictive world of *The Jew of Malta*, then, while not yet belonging to the expansionist economies of capital, is profoundly attentive to how money gets moved, manipulated, and managed, and in how social relations are shaped and reshaped by these acts of circulation. Barabas comes into wealth through trade, among many other "professions"; Ferneze pays the Ottoman tribute by seizing Barabas's wealth; Barabas restores himself by recovering a hidden stash of gold, some of which he uses to purchase a slave, who eventually blackmails him; and so on in an ever-lengthening chain in which money transfers, circulates, and accumulates into certain hands, but never multiplies on its own—or, with Barabas reemerging in act 2 "as wealthy as" before, it multiplies covertly, mysteriously, behind the scenes. To account for this, the self must become its own unit of multiplication, the agentic person the author of their own expansion: "Summon thy senses, call thy wits together" (1.1.177). In the play's imbricated networks of trade, war, slavery, prostitution, and crime, the circulation and exchange of money helps clarify otherwise muddied and overdetermined social relations: it shows that you have this, and I have that. But these acts of exchange aren't ever, in this play, mediated by labor (strictly speaking), or by "profession" as we have come to understand it. (An important exception is its opening scene, which shows Barabas engaged in merchant labor.) Rather, they are mediated by another kind of "profession" that enlists

the resources of play: of wit, theater, stratagem, the dispositional tools needed to navigate a position of precarity in a highly enmeshed, entangled world.

As a closing example of the ways play is always bursting through the rhythms of labor, I turn to the scene of the slave market, where Barabas first meets and purchases Ithamore. Another way of articulating what I see happening here is not that play has replaced work, but that it has become co-productive with work. Barabas's disposition in the slave market is marked by a playful posturing, by an ease and a feeling for playful exchange that is nonetheless accomplishing his purpose: to find a co-conspirator in his plot to revenge himself on his rivals. I quote from this scene at some length to give a sense of its pacing, its tone, and its relational dynamism:

> LODOWICK: Ratest thou this Moor but at two hundred plates?
> FIRST OFFICER: No more, my lord.
> BARABAS: Why should this Turk be dearer than this Moor?
> FIRST OFFICER: Because he is young, and has more qualities.
> BARABAS: What, hast the philosopher's stone? And thou hast,
> break my head with it; I'll forgive thee.
> SLAVE. No, sir, I can cut and shave.
> BARABAS: Let me see, sirrah; are you not an old shaver?
> SLAVE: Alas, sir, I am a very youth.
> BARABAS: A youth? I'll buy you, and marry you to Lady Vanity
> if you do well.
> SLAVE: I will serve you, sir—
> BARABAS: Some wicked trick or other. It may be, under color of
> shaving, thou'lt cut my throat for my goods. Tell me,
> hast thou thy health well?
> SLAVE: Ay, passing well.
> BARABAS: So much the worse; I must have one that's sickly, and't
> be but for sparing victuals: 'tis not a stone of beef a day
> will maintain you in these chops. Let me see one that's
> somewhat leaner.
> FIRST OFFICER: Here's a leaner; how like you him?
> BARABAS: Where wast thou born?
> ITHAMORE: In Thrace; brought up in Arabia.
> BARABAS: So much the better; thou art for my turn.
> An hundred crowns? I'll have him; there's the coin.
> [*Gives money.*]
> FIRST OFFICER: Then mark him, sir, and take him hence.
> BARABAS: *Ay, mark him, you were best; for this is he* [*Aside.*]

That by my help shall do much villainy.

(2.3.109-36)

Throughout this exchange Barabas's language is by turns punning, comic, literary, burlesque—and yet, centered on the purchasing of human commodities, always grimly serious. It is not merely that Barabas is having a nice time buying a slave, diverting himself while going about his business; it is that his very jocularity is accomplishing a kind of work. In order to determine what "qualities" make the Turkish slave more expensive than the Moor, Barabas makes a sarcastic quip about alchemical proficiency before punningly calling the slave a "shaver"—here a triple entendre in which the slave figures at once as a barber; as a "fellow, chap…a humorous fellow, joker, wag;" and as an illicit trimmer of coins, a financial scammer.[55] The slave at first intends the first meaning ("I can cut and shave"), but, following Barabas's lead ("are you not an old shaver?"), plays in his next response on the second meaning: "Alas, sir, I am a very youth." Barabas, meanwhile, begins with the second meaning ("I'll…marry you to Lady Vanity" [a stock figure from the morality play]) before slipping back to the first ("under colour of shaving, thou'lt cut my throat"). In the background of this punning chiasmus, in which Barabas and the slave rhetorically crisscross one another in a kind of dance, the third meaning hovers unspoken but always implied, given Barabas's financial incentives. Paranoid about the loss of his "goods," Barabas engages the slave in this ludic verbal exchange as a form of intelligence-gathering.[56] A financial scammer ("shaver") could be quite useful to Barabas; then again, a greedy slave with a razor could finish him off. By playing with language, Barabas means to discover which of these meanings he is up against. It is thus not in spite of but through his playfulness that Barabas's work is accomplished.

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[55] *OED*, s.v., "shaver, *n.*," 3a. See also Sandra K. Fisher, *Econolingua: A Glossary of Coins and Economic Language in Renaissance Drama* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1985), 119. Both entries reference this scene from *The Jew of Malta*.

[56] For more on Barabas as an "information gatherer," see Jardine, 101.

Yet by the time he reaches Ithamore, he no longer has need for such exchange. Asking him only where he was born, Barabas purchases him seemingly because he comes at the lowest cost, half the price of the two-hundred-crown Turk and "lean" enough to not require too much food. In spite of his confident aside that "you were best," Barabas has no way of knowing, sans interview, whether Ithamore really is the best option for the "villainy" he intends; but because the price is right, he can forego the witty sparring that he felt necessary with the expensive Turk. This situation, facilitated by the reduction of human beings into merchandise, reflects the character of Mediterranean slavery in which the piratical capturing of slaves for the purposes of demanding ransom payments loomed large.[57] The play's description of a slave "market-place" (2.3.1), which had long existed in Malta, doesn't suggest this particular purpose; and, of course, Marlowe fictively situates Malta under Ottoman domination even though the historical events to which the play seems to refer, the 1565 Siege of Malta, ended with the Knights Hospitaller successfully repealing the Ottoman invasion. Still, raiding and ransoming was a predominant feature of Mediterranean slavery, where commerce raids were the norm and where different, sometimes conflicting, values, objectives, and rules guided the approach to slavery by the various powers competing in its waters. Negotiation was thus paramount, and it is notable then that Barabas doesn't identify any particular use to which he will put Ithamore other than the practice of villainy. The people sold at Malta's slave market, which boomed under the Knights Hospitaller, were usually "captured from Turkish galleys," and "provided the labor for building and repairing fortifications, transporting food and water, and disposing of bodies"; they also performed various

[57] For more on Mediterranean slavery and the anxieties it produced in late-sixteenth-century England, see Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 121-54. For the Ottoman influence on Mediterranean slaving, see Joshua M. White, "Piracy of the Ottoman Mediterranean: Slave Laundering and Subjecthood," in *The Making of the Modern Mediterranean: Views from the South*, ed. Judith E. Tucker (Oakland: Univ. of California Press, 2019), 95-122.

kinds of naval and military service for the Order.[58] Barabas, a Jew with little political though considerable economic power, does not enlist Ithamore for any of this kind of labor, but rather to become a co-conspirator with him in his already ambiguous "profession." The quasi-ludic negotiations we find him participating in in this scene, then, in their own way reflect the indeterminacy at the heart of what his relationship with Ithamore is. This is far from the typical slaver/enslaved relationship, and yet the way Barabas moves through the slave market and ultimately purchases Ithamore reflects, in a quite troubling way, the somewhat erratic character of Mediterranean slavery.

Ithamore will eventually get duped by the courtesan, Bellamira, and her pimp, Pilia-Borza, into turning on Barabas, in yet another example of the always-fluid social rearrangements that *Jew* is interested in staging. Complaining that "since this town was besieged, my gain grows cold" (3.1.1), Bellamira has lost her usual clientele of merchants from Venice and scholars from Padua (ll. 5-7), and turns her gaze to how she might reach into Barabas's deep pockets. She plots to do so not by seducing Barabas but by feigning interest in Ithamore who is made the instrument of blackmail, threatening to expose Barabas's crimes unless he pays up. It is in the context of this erotic economy that the Passionate Shepherd reappears, with Ithamore telling Bellamira, "Thou in those groves, by Dis above, / Shalt live with me and be my love" (4.2.103-4). This is often glossed as an ironic or parodic reference to the poem since Bellamira is engaging Ithamore in amatory play disingenuously, that is, for her own financial gain. But as my reading of the erotic economy of the poem suggested, there is perhaps more similitude than ironic difference in this dramatic rewriting; we never actually receive the nymph's reply, and Ralegh's companion poem imagines that she is anything but persuaded. Here, as in the poem, the erotic invitation must be situated within a larger,

[58] Vaughan, 345.

more complicated picture of economic circulation, whose mercantile energies are eroticized in order to give them greater purchase. Barabas, similarly disingenuously, will tell Pilia-Borza that "never loved man servant as I do Ithamore" (4.3.55), mere lines before determining to "in some disguise go see the slave," with the telling intention of finding out "how the villain revels with my gold" (ll. 66-67), and eventually poisoning him. Accusing Ithamore of being "employed in catzerie / And crossbiting" as he reads his letters of blackmail (4.3.12-13), Barabas has found that his own profession defined by stratagem and trickery is a game that can be played by his enslaved co-conspirator, too. His curiosity to find out how his extorted money is being spent reflects some of the erotic or libidinal impulse I have been identifying in the acts of circulation Marlowe represents. Fed up with Ithamore's fuckery (to translate "catzerie" in the vulgar spirit of its Italian source word, *cazzo*), Barabas nonetheless turns his revenge into a form of entertainment, both for others (disguising himself as a French musician to play for Ithamore and Bellamira), and for himself, to leer at Ithamore in action: "*How liberally the villain gives me mine own gold!*" (4.4.49).[59] The intent of this mercantile game is not just to end up with the most gold, and not just to aggressively outperform one's competitors, but to find a certain degree of pleasure in the whole enterprise.

These competitive relations are characterized by a near-constant state of flux because their agents are deeply unpredictable; masters at dissembling, they are also often not what they seem to others, as Bellamira to Ithamore or Barabas to his own daughter, whom he also eventually poisons. In the chapters that follow, I will examine how both William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson take up this issue of predictability in their merchant and city comedies, which reward those with the canniness to profitably anticipate what others will do. Though darkly comic, Marlowe's tragedies

[59] Bawcutt defines "catzerie" as "cheating, trickery; presumably formed from Italian 'cazzo'" (lit. the male sexual organ, or, more vulgarly, "dick," but idiomatically used as something closer to "what the fuck" [*che cazzo*]). As Bawcutt notes, there are no other examples of "catzerie" in the *OED* (see EN to 4.3.12).

reflect a situation in which this attempt ultimately fails. Barabas is brought down, in the end, by a miscalculation, and ends up boiling alive in the cauldron he had prepared for his rivals. Though ambivalent, Marlowe's merchant tragedy is nonetheless infused with the spirit of play. Its social relations, always mediated by coin, are endlessly fungible. Pilia-Borza, for example, teaches Ithamore how to reconceive his relation with Barabas through simple, meaningful substitutions to his modes of address:

> PILIA: Send for a hundred crowns at least.
> ITHAMORE: Ten hundred thousand crowns. (*He writes*) "Master Barabas—"
> PILIA: Write not so submissively, but threatening him.
> ITHAMORE: "Sirrah Barabas, send me a hundred crowns."
> PILIA: Put in two hundred at least.
>
> (4.2.74-77)

As Pilia knows, "Master Barabas" is unlikely to respond to the demand; but "Sirrah Barabas" just might, if the tone is "threatening" enough. This moment of pedagogy reveals not simply the social constructedness of relations, but their manipulability. It is not that "master" actually becomes "sirrah" through the act of renaming, but that the master treated as a slave might adopt the posture of the slave when the slave has adopted the posture of the master. Expanded into a much more totalizing register, this relational fungibility is what the play itself seeks to represent and interrogate. In Governor Ferneze's mechanical universe, where the Jew simply generates wealth *ex nihilo* and where law and decree "cannot be recall'd" (1.2.97), there is little room for a logic of gaming in theory; but it manifests everywhere in practice, as Ferneze's own hypocritical Machiavellianism shows.[60] Barabas, however, by emphasizing that "this is the life we Jews are us'd to lead; / And reason too, for Christians do the like" (5.4.117-18), opens up space for risky

[60] For the argument that Ferneze, not Barabas, is the play's true disciple of Machiavelli, see Enrico Stanic, "Machiavellianism in Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*," in *Machiavellian Encounters in Tudor and Stuart England: Literary and Political Influences from the Reformation to the Restoration*, ed. Alessandro Arienzo and others (London: Routledge: 2013), 81.

interpersonal play. He recognizes the use of wit for economic gain and understands his success in terms of shifting relationality, rather than entrenched or encrusted qualities. Shakespeare will inherit from Marlowe this attitude of "playing with" the logics of social relations, including in his merchant comedy, *The Merchant of Venice*, whose treatment of Jewishness is however much less forgiving than Marlowe's. In Shakespeare's mercantile worlds, socioeconomic relations are driven not just by the intense, even murderous, rivalries we find in Marlowe, but by a peculiar queer mode that seeks to play *with*, rather than against, one's rivals.

CHAPTER 3

"An unthrift love": the Merchant, the Shrew, and Shakespeare's Queer Mercantilism

EMCEE: We switch partners daily
To play as we please.
GIRLS: Twosies beats onesies…
EMCEE: But nothing beats threes!
I sleep in the middle.
GIRL 1: I'm left!
GIRL 2: Und I'm right!
EMCEE: But there's room on the bottom
If you drop in some night.
—*Cabaret*, "Two Ladies"

This chapter turns its attention to what I call *genderplay*, the purposive performance of a gendered subjectivity for financial profit. This may seem a curious and rather specific mode of desiring, applicable perhaps only to the archetypal gold digger who marries for money rather than for love. However, the relations I examine here are both more complex and more fundamental to an early period of merchant capitalism. If in Marlowe an eroticized world of commodities provides the material foundation for an invitational mode of desiring that identifies and solicits the love of the desired object, in Shakespeare these circuits of desire are subject to greater rearrangement and flux and are thereby infused with a queer energy. This is not to suggest that any intersubjective relational twist makes a relationship queer. Rather, the relations I examine in this chapter are queer because they utterly conflate separate domains of desire, in this case the mercantile and the amatory, such that each is legible not against or in spite of but only through and because of the other. I thus follow Christine Varnado in affirming that, "[a]t times, what is queer about the shape of desire or erotic energy in an early modern text is not a person, an act, or an identity, but rather

the larger system or structure through which affects and relations circulate."[1] What I am tracing is a particular cultural phenomenon wherein the profit-motive destabilizes heterosexuality by introducing new and sometimes mystifying modes of relation into the marital pairing, including in forms of risk-taking that, in the most extreme scenarios, threaten to dissolve the marital relation altogether.

In my readings of two Shakespearean merchant comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1592) and *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596), I thus engage two histories that are often held just out of reach of one another: queer history and economic history. It is not that these histories never intersect, but that, especially in the past few decades, they are often understood as having inherently antagonistic objectives. Recent work on queer temporality has, for example, enlisted queerness expressly against or in defiance of reproductivity and linear time, and thus against the rhythms of capitalism itself. This positioning has usually depended upon defining queerness against normativity, even against definition; as Madhavi Menon memorably puts it, "if queerness can be defined, then it is no longer queer."[2] Since the publication of Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004), queerness has been almost reflexively identified with an interruption of some of the most deeply reified social and psychical norms, a move that, to be sure, has had tremendous political and ideological impact. Yet queer theory has also recently begun problematizing its assumption that the normative, especially across time, was ever stable; what counts as normal has been more

[1] Christine Varnado, *The Shapes of Fancy: Reading for Desire in Early Modern Literature* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2020), 3.

[2] Madhavi Menon, *Unhistorical Shakespeare: Queer Theory in Shakespearean Literature and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 7. Carla Freccero is similarly affirmative of queer's indeterminacy in *Queer/Early/ Modern* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2006). More recently, the position that "queer is attached to a person or behavior that is not named by [the] culture that regulates representation" has been reaffirmed in *Queer Shakespeare: Desire and Sexuality*, ed. Goran Stanivukovich (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2017), 12. For forceful critiques of periodization that enlist a queerness understood as anti-futural, see "Forum: Queering History," *PMLA* 121.3 (2006): 837-39.

uncertain and contestable than we have tended to recognize.[3] The assumption of identifiable and cohesive norms sometimes fails to account for the complex interrelations of desire, practice, and identity that constitute lived experience. And if particular instantiations of the normal tend to be identified through the often-dubious measure of common sense, the issue becomes even muddier when trying to excavate what was normative for the past.[4] It is certainly the case that opposite-sex desire has not been subjected to the same punitive control or the same rhetorics of shame and disgust as same-sex desire, a privileging that has made the hetero- appear normative within a Foucauldean genealogy of discourse and power.[5] And yet, to the degree that both are discursively constructed, neither hetero- nor homo- are, or have ever been, flat or stable categories, as Foucault also averred. Thus, scholars working in the history of sex must remain particularly vigilant about the ways that such categories are and have been enlisted.

In early modern studies, the work of Valerie Traub has been especially influential in clarifying and expanding this question. Critiquing what she calls "the new unhistoricism in queer studies," Traub insists that queer anti-normativity "celebrate[s] the instability of queer by means of a false universalization of the normal."[6] Traub asks what it means to, for example, call the

[3] See, for example, the special issue of *differences* 26.1 (2015), titled "Queer Theory without Antinormativity"; and, for a more period-specific application, Sarah Nicolazzo, "Queer Early Modernity Beyond the Antinormative," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 16.4 (2016): 1-8.

[4] Normativity is a very wide umbrella with a long and complex history; political normativity, concerned with things like law, justice, policy, and so on, must be differentiated from ethical normativity, related to concerns about the good or the morally right. A sense of "the normal" as universal and thus accessible to reason, the foundation of liberal subjectivity, traces back to Immanuel Kant; this Enlightenment view has of course been sharply critiqued by thinkers like Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Gilles Deleuze, and Judith Butler, among others. My use of "common sense" does not mean to recover the Kantian sense of universality but rather to indicate that, functionally, this is still often the default assumption informing uses of the term in common parlance.

[5] As Foucault argues, in premodernity "prohibitions bearing on sex were essentially of a juridical nature. The 'nature' on which they were based was still a kind of law." Beginning in the eighteenth century, however, "peripheral sexualities" began to be treated as qualitatively different, not part of the same mass of the "unnatural" but instead as discretely pathologizable expressions, from which a more familiarly modern rubric of norm and deviation derives. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley [1978] (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 38-39.

[6] Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 76.

speaker of William Shakespeare's sonnets queer—by which critics usually mean homo- or bisexual—given the relative tolerance of a certain form of "orderly male homoeroticism" in early modern culture; indeed, it seems open to debate whether (or, better, to what extent/s) the sonneteer "resist[s] his culture's normative categories of gender and sexuality."[7] For Traub, as for others like Alan Bray, Laurie Shannon, Mario DiGangi, and Jeffrey Masten, a responsible queer temporality necessitates historiographic care; queerness is shaped by culture and does not unproblematically traverse time and historical change.[8] This is not, by any means, to discount any of the rich queer presentisms—shaped by poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and other methodologies—that continue to prove invaluable to the study of queer life. Rather, it is to appreciate that a complex interfacing between past and present is the necessary antidote both to a naïve progress narrative of historical development (from mass repression to mass acceptance, for example) and to a potentially irresponsible de-historicizing of queer desire as legible across time in ways that we recognize—which is often tantamount to saying, in the ways that we would like for them to be.[9]

To this discussion, only sketchily outlined here, I reiterate that a fully rounded historicist account ought to read queerness not only in terms of desire—the embodied desire of one kind of

[7] Traub, 239. To this end, Traub quotes Margreta de Grazia's assertion that the sonnet speaker's interracial desire for the dark lady, and not his desire for the young man, would have been the sequence's more legibly "queer" desire for an early modern reader (234).

[8] For historicizing approaches to queer subjectivity, see, among many others, Alan Bray's pathbreaking *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* [1982] (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1995), and *The Friend* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003); Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991); Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002); Mario diGangi, "Queer Theory, Historicism, and Early Modern Sexualities," *Criticism* 48.1 (2006): 129-42; and Jeffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare's Time* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). See also the edited collection *Queer Renaissance Historiography: Backward Gaze*, ed. Vin Nardizzi and Stephen Guy-Bray (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

[9] As Heather Love argues, "contemporary critics tend to describe the encounter with the past in idealizing terms," such that "[t]he longing for community across time is a crucial feature of queer historical experience, one produced by the historical isolation of individual queers as well as by the damaged quality of the historical archive" (*Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007], 32, 37). This project of "emotional rescue" can, at times, produce a feeling of continuity between a now and a then at the expense of historical, cultural, and other kinds of difference.

subject for another—but also as a function of relation and kinship. Indeed, desire does not always emerge fully-formed from or within one desiring individual, but is produced in network with other desiring subjects. But how does such desire, granted it is made legible and known, get taken up by broader networks of both queer and straight affinity? This chapter seeks to illuminate vital ligatures between the historic expansion of (European) mercantile networks, beginning around the mid-sixteenth century, and the development of new forms of queer kinship. The conclusions I reach here are specific to a certain period of capitalist development, but I think such a dialectic between the dictates of economic need and affinitive or relational patterning is new and energizing territory for queer theory, which has been accustomed to identifying heteronormativity with economic models of financial gain, property transfer, inheritance, and the like but has left queer relationality largely untouched by such questions.[10] My guess is that this oversight has been made largely on the assumption that queer subjects were more or less illegible in the premodern world as economic transactors except perhaps in the shadowy underground of male prostitution—one of the more obvious ways in which desire is monetized. What I intend here is, however, not so much the recovery of queer actors in heretofore unnoticed economic roles but rather of an emergent queering of heteronormative relations under the pressures of mercantilism, which we might read within a broader and, thus far, undertheorized economic history of queerness.

Since Aristotle, the language of breeding had been identified with money's "unnatural" self-reproduction in the act of usury, and early moderns seem to have discovered a linguistic and ideological homology between counterfeiting coin and sodomy.[11] Thus, where queer desire has

[10] Bray's work on the institution of sworn brotherhood in *The Friend* is a notable exception, although Bray is quite careful not to assume that these relationships were implicitly homosexual and situates them more within a history of affective kinship than an economic history per se.

[11] On counterfeit and sodomy see Will Fisher, "Queer Money," *ELH* 66.1 (1999): 1-23; for money and reproductivity, see David Hawkes's chapter "Sodomy, Usury, and the Narrative of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*," in *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 95-114.

emerged into economic life, it has usually been as the negative other of permissible economic relation, with heterosexual reproduction understood as the natural engine of economic fecundity. What I identify here is a rival discourse, charted especially in the public drama and represented with particular force and clarity in Shakespeare's Italian comedies, that treats mercantile entanglement as the conditions or grounds for a queering of traditional kinship networks. The more byzantine the financial network, or the more difficult the acquisition of financial resources, the greater the need for the rearticulation of normative patterns of behavior and relationality. The changing landscape of bourgeois amatory sensibility represented by these plays ends up rendering heterosexual marriage *more* unstable, more mystified, and therefore more open to queer reshaping than it had been previously: they give us a queer mercantilism in heterosexual dress.

In these comedies, risk-taking and wager—self-consciously modeled on mercantile hazarding for profit—are shown to be productive of multiple forms of queer relation, from homosocial rivalries to more expressly homoerotic affinities and even plural erotic ties. Shakespeare's *Shrew* and *Merchant*, which each draw attention to not only the mercantile but also the ludic dimensions of risk (as wager, as casket-game), bring the play of amatory relations or *genderplay* into the same signifying zones as the financial gambits of risk. The male legacy-hunters of these comedies set sail on the turbulent seas of the marriage market where financial success is guaranteed through a canny mercantile sensibility, relying upon a queer understanding of amatory networks as pliable, expandable (like capital), and "unthrift," to recall Lorenzo's flirtatious rebuke of Jessica's "unthrift love" in *Merchant*.[12] Further, these plays do not merely suggest a homology between the play of amatory relations and that of risky mercantile venture, but in fact show how

[12] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2006), act 5, scene 1, line 16. Hereafter abbreviated by act, scene, and line number.

financial entanglements actually produce queer relational possibility. The play of desire is shaped by the rhythms of capital, just as the rhythms of capital also obey the dictates of desire.

By *genderplay* I mean to engage something like "the question of how erotic practice stands to the negotiation of subjectivity within relations between men and women" that Catherine Waldby, drawing from the language of theater, finds in the "choreography of sexual encounters."[13] But I also mean to emphasize that such negotiation (a particularly apt dictional choice) is not only one between erotic desire and the struggle for social dominance but also, as Shakespeare's plays show, a kind of business transaction. The early modern *oikos*, in early modernity so often analogized to the state with the domestic husband acting as political sovereign, was also—in a parallel if still fledgling discourse—coming to be understood as a financial enterprise, a kind of tiny company or corporation. By effecting what Natasha Korda calls the "*embourgeoisement*" of their folkloric source materials, Shakespeare's merchant comedies bring marital relations into the spaces of early capitalism where the thorough financialization of courtship and marriage renders a peculiar affective relation.[14] It is a relation defined by competition *and* cooperation, by risk *and* security, in an extension of capital's own fluctuations and contradictions, complicating the more straightforwardly hierarchical relations of dominance and submission that politically defined the early modern marriage.[15]

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[13] Quoted in Mimi Schippers, *Beyond Monogamy: Polyamory and the Future of Polyqueer Sexualities* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 137. I also find Simone Chess's work helpful in thinking about participatory models of gender construction between partners, though (drawing from sociologist Jane Ward's theory of gender labor) Chess theorizes this in the more specific context of relationships between one cisgender and one trans* partner. See Chess, "'Or whatever you be': Crossdressing, Sex, and Gender Labour in John Lyly's *Gallathea*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 38.4 (2015): 145-66; and Jane Ward, "Gender Labor: Transmen, Femmes, and Collective Work of Transgression," *Sexualities* 13.2 (2010): 236-54.

[14] Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 62, emphasis original.

[15] This is not to suggest that the hierarchy of marriage was, in and of itself, free of important tensions. As Frances Dolan points out, the early modern English housewife was overseer of the household's servants and domestic laborers and, as such, acted "as both her husband's partner and his subordinate," a "contradictory position" that required careful negotiation ("Household Chastisements: Gender, Authority, and 'Domestic Violence,'" in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1999],

In both *Shrew* and *Merchant*, security can be had only by first making oneself vulnerable, by risking the very relation that one hopes to secure. Thus, in the term genderplay I hope to capture some of the affective frisson produced by this push-and-pull, where the negotiation of the marital contract was also an act of co-constructing gendered relations themselves. As made clear by Katherine's final speech in *Shrew*, this co-construction is ultimately predicated on wifely submission, and it would be a mistake to suggest that the mercantile model of transactional marital partnership is in this period ever triumphant over the legal and political model of the husband's rule over his wife. In fact, the model of mutual affection between husband and wife staged by these plays serves as a kind of ideological coverup for the radical asymmetry between them, an asymmetry produced and reinforced precisely by disparities in economic ownership. (Portia, for example, gleefully transfers her household and all of her assets to Bassanio halfway through *Merchant*, on the understanding that becoming his wife means relinquishing the property inherited from her father to him.) Nonetheless, it is striking that in both plays the ability of husband and wife to perform together is financially rewarded, calling attention to a shared logic between capital growth or economic fecundity and the calculated performance of amatory relationality. It is not until *Merchant* that this intentional, risky gaming of erotic and marital relationality unleashes a fully queer imaginary, as my reading of that play will show; but in *Shrew*, with the erotic play of Kate and Petruchio presided over by the Induction's Bartholomew crossdressed as the pretend-wife of Christopher Sly, we find a similar generic ease or fellow-feeling between an "unthrift" mercantile logic of promiscuous accumulation and an always-hovering queer imaginary of manipulatable gendered relations.

204-28). See also Dolan, *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Melissa Sanchez has written persuasively on the erotics of political subjection in *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

I restrict my analysis to this pair of plays for a few reasons. First, these Italian comedies—one set in Venice, the other in nearby Padua which had been under the dominion of the Republic of Venice since 1405—both expressly figure their marriage plots in terms of financial ambition.[16] "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua," Petruchio announces, unabashedly, "If wealthily, then happily in Padua;"[17] and, "In Belmont is a lady richly left," Bassanio tells Antonio in the course of seeking the loan he needs to court her (1.1.160). Second, these comedies represent play—whether as jest, wager, a game of fortune, or a ring-trick—as a lucrative mode of acquisition. Jest, for example, so central to the conventions of comedy, functions very differently in a play like *Twelfth Night*, where the joke on Malvolio is a mockery of his cross-class desire for the wealthy countess Olivia but remains secondary to the love-plots between Viola, Olivia, and Orsino. In *Shrew*, by contrast, the extended pun on jest/gest insinuates that jest has material and ideological functions beyond carnival pranking—including massive financial gain. Nor do I mean for genderplay to be taken as equivalent with cross-gendered performance, though it may certainly include that (as in *Shrew*'s Induction). Cross-dressing is also central to *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, but the romantic entanglements of those plays happen by accident and misidentification and thus do not fall under the rubric of purposive gendered performance for profit that I am interested in. Something similar might be said of the bed-tricks in the comedy *All's Well That Ends Well* or the problem play *Measure for Measure*, which come closer to what I mean by genderplay though they lack the express financial motive.

Financially risky wagers were a popular plot element in dramas of the 1590s and 1600s, and not just in comedy. The aristocratic wager between Sir Francis and Sir Charles that opens

[16] While *Merchant* is now usually read as a problem play, its designation as a comedy in the First Folio (1623) provides my warrant for understanding it, alongside *Shrew*, as a comedy in the judgment of its contemporary audiences.
[17] Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Dympna Callaghan (New York: Norton, 2009), act 5, scene 2, line 120. Hereafter abbreviated by act, scene, and line number.

Thomas Heywood's domestic tragedy *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) is the engine of that plot's devolution into violence and penury. The fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes, with Claudius wagering on Hamlet's success, is likewise a vehicle of tragic outcome. Made between men, wagers are very often a homosocial device for verifying masculinity either by proving one's prowess in sport (fencing, hawking) or by testing a woman's constancy. In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* a 10,000-ducat wager is made on Imogen's chastity, though this is less about fear of cuckoldry than about mitigating a potential hit to reputation or credit. "If you make your voyage upon [Imogen] and give me directly to understand you have prevailed," Posthumus tells Iacomo, "I am no further your enemy; she is not worth our debate. If she remain unseduced…for your ill opinion and th'assault you have made to her chastity you shall answer me with your sword."[18] The rather callous remark that his wife is not "worth" their trouble should she prove unfaithful seems disproportionate to the violence Iacomo is said to deserve for merely insinuating ill repute about her, leading to the drawing-up of a complicated "covenant" with a number of stipulations and agreed-upon items of exchange depending on the wager's outcome.[19] We find these same rivalries in *Shrew* and, in a very different form, in *Merchant*, but what distinguishes the comedies is their ideological use of wager not just as a tool of verification about one gendered subjectivity or another but also as a lucrative mode of financial gain in its own right. Baptista is so amazed by Kate's reformation that he doubles her dowry, and the calculated risk Bassanio takes to court Portia pays off in the acquisition of all her wealth and household.

[18] Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare, Seventh Edition*, ed. David Bevington (Boston: Pearson, 2014), act 1, scene 4, lines 158-64.
[19] *Cymbeline*, act 1, scene 4, line 165. In his reading of the play, Stephen Guy-Bray concludes that *Cymbeline* "is at once queer and not queer," a stance which helpfully frames what I see happening in *Shrew* and *Merchant* though their queer elements are less latent ("Locating Queerness in *Cymbeline*," in *Queer Shakespeare*, 136).

I will elaborate in what follows on what makes the heterosexual marriages of these plays queer. Here I note that the easy relationship between queerness and mercantile acquisitiveness that I've identified may produce the rather uneasy sense of a collusion or affinity between capitalism and queer life, even if the particular phenomenon I'm tracking is historically bounded or limited. But such an economic history may help us better understand the troubling complicity that certain forms of queerness have adopted toward the excesses and abuses of capital. Shakespeare's *Merchant* is all but a primer on racial capitalism's toleration of a certain form of "palatable" queerness: the Jewish moneylender Shylock, while at the center of the play's financial entanglements, reaps none of its affinitive rewards, always shut out by the fact of his Jewishness and financially ruined in the end by the Christians' "mercy." If it feels familiar and natural to read heterosexual marriage as an economic relation imbricated with harmful ideological structures like patriarchy, we have been more reticent to read the history of queerness in similar terms, relegating it almost entirely to the self-enclosing domain of sexual desire. But, in Shakespeare's Italian comedies (as in some of the Sonnets), an imaginary of relations that are pliable, fecund, and "unthrift"—with significant limits and exceptions, as the case of Shylock shows—becomes specially legible under the pressures and opportunities of merchant capitalism. Thus, I contend here with the sometimes uncomfortable reality that "no necessary or foreknown politics attaches to queerness, either in the early modern period or today," as Varnado puts it.[20]

I opened with a reflection on queer temporality because, tied into risk, wager, and early speculative finance, the amatory relations of these plays are both queer and future-facing, indeed future-facing and *thus* interested in queering whatever may threaten future opportunity, reminding

[20] Varnado, ch. 4. This skepticism about the inherently liberatory character of gay attraction stretches back at least to Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" [1987], in *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010), 3-30.

us that reproductive futurity cannot be the exclusive province of a normative heterosexuality. These plays identify a certain opportunistic capaciousness in both the merchant's speculative activity and in the queer play or reconfiguration of social and amatory relations that follows from it, complicating but also, I think, enriching the critical picture of queer history and temporality that has been generatively developing in the critical conversations on early modern queerness over the past several decades.

I. THE GAMING OF THE SHREW

Shrew is the only of Shakespeare's comedies to feature a wedding ceremony squarely at the center, rather than the end, of the play; *Merchant* begins to stage one, but Bassanio is whisked away on the business of redeeming Antonio, leaving him engaged though not quite married to Portia. *Shrew* thus refuses the usual identification of marriage with comic closure by extending its marital relationship into a partial future.[21] This future turns out to be one of, primarily, speculative risk, as Petruchio wagers against two other husbands, Hortensio and Lucentio, on "whose wife is most obedient, / To come at first when he doth send for her" (5.2.68-69). It is a future that continues to imagine more futures when, shocked by the formerly shrewish Kate's performance of obedience and her winning of the wager, the three husbands reflect on the marriage to come:

> LUCENTIO: Here is a wonder, if you talk of a wonder.
> HORTENSIO: And so it is. I wonder what it bodes.
> PETRUCHIO: Marry, peace it bodes, and love, and quiet life,
> An awful rule, and right supremacy,
> And, to be short, what not that's sweet and happy.
> (5.2.110-14)

[21] Lisa Hopkins has already examined "the internal stresses and contradictions to which [marriage] is constantly subject" in *The Shakespearean Marriage: Merry Wives and Heavy Husbands* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 33. *Shrew* is one of few plays that expressly foregrounds and calls attention to these stresses before suddenly and mystifyingly resolving them.

The subtle pun here on bodes/abodes suggests that the *oikos* has its own, possibly indeterminate, temporality; it is imagined as its own risk-taking corporation that looks forward into a future of possibility. The shocking scene of compatibility between Kate and Petruchio on which the play ends—a virtuosic performance by a wife that wins a large financial wager made by her husband—closes the play not in legal or ceremonial contract but in a dazzling display of financial co-acquisition. Petruchio is confident of his "supremacy," but Lucentio and Hortensio are right to wonder, to be mystified by this performance; capital itself is mystifying, fecund and multiplicative without divulging the patterns of labor that enable and prop it up. Marriage, too, a sacrament of the Church, is a mystery. There is a lot to "wonder" about in this final scene.

One of Shakespeare's likely source materials, the midcentury ballad "A Merry Iest of a Shrewde and Curste Wyfe," also ends with an assembly and a surprising demonstration of wifely obedience, but the ballad wife quickly disenchants her audience when she brings her mother down to the cellar to show her the salted, bloody morel's skin in which her husband had wrapped her after beating her. From this morel comes an unambiguous moral: her equally shrewish mother is so horrified by what she sees that she, too, is reformed.[22] By ending on "wonder" rather than demystification, Shakespeare's *Shrew* reworks this received narrative logic of punishment and rehabilitation into a proto-capitalist fantasy of financial play, where Petruchio determines to court and marry the wealthy Kate the moment he hears of her (and tells us exactly how he will do it) and where a final act of risky wager pays off more handsomely than either of them could have hoped. Kate and Petruchio's remunerative genderplay thus signals a remarkable departure from earlier shrew-taming tales, many of which end on scenes of appalling domestic violence, and a movement into the spaces of early capitalism where husband and wife play together for profit. The home

[22] See anonymous, "A Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curst Wife Lapped in Morel's Skin, for Her Good Behavior" (c. 1550), reprinted in Callaghan (ed.), 106-19.

remains the site of masculinist "awful rule" but is also being reconfigured into a space of ambitious financial gain, one whose success hinges in the end not on masculinist supremacy (even if this continues to be its operative ideology) but on a more corporate interplay between husband and wife that necessitates their mutual embracing of risky futurity.

In characterizing this marital relation as one of companionate play, I in no way mean to ignore or deemphasize the abuse and misogyny at its root. There is simply no way around the fact that in *Shrew* a headstrong woman is "tamed," and in part for pure sport, like a falcon; or, as Shirley Nelson Garner hauntingly puts it, "The pithy truth that *Taming* contains implies a kind of heterosexual agony."[23] The form of play that triumphs in act 5 remains heterosexist at its core, but it also replaces the worst indulgences of masculinist violence, predicated on the total subjection of women as property, with an emerging sense that domestic economy is strongest and most successful when husband and wife vie together for their mutual profit and security. As the home became increasingly a site of consumption rather than production, women's labor was rendered increasingly invisible, not enjoying the same dignity or remuneration as the "male" sphere of production and exchange, a reorientation that held especially true for the upper or at least upwardly-mobile classes.[24] But in this mercantilist drama we find a rather different representation of gendered labor, at least in regard to the financial power exercised in and by marriage. By staging marriage as a financially productive machine, *Shrew* reimagines the home as a kind of profitable business that demands careful balancing of risky venture and companionate surety, a sense that one's partner must remain *predictable* if relational vulnerability is to pay off.

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[23] Shirley Nelson Garner, "*The Taming of the Shrew*: Inside or Outside of the Joke?" [1988], reprinted in Callaghan (ed.), 217.

[24] See Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, ed. and trans. Diana Leonard (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Susan Cahn, *Industry of Devotion: The Transformation of Women's Work in England, 1500-1660* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1987); and Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), esp. 61-131.

This model of lucrative companionate play expressly "win[s]" out in competition against *Shrew*'s other marriages (5.2.210). Indeed, the wager pits competing models of courtship and marriage against one another and exposes the faulty economic logic beneath them. It is small wonder that Hortensio was not able to successfully predict how his wife the widow might behave, since they seem not to know each other at all; she emerges onto the scene as an alternative for Bianca whom Hortensio had unsuccessfully courted. Meanwhile, Bianca and Lucentio's conventional *commedia dell'arte* courtship of trickery and disguise, while on its face more playful than Kate and Petruchio's sadistic exchanges, fails to generate financial profit and is thereby rendered questionable. Their verbal exchange after Lucentio loses the wager not only laments this financial loss but also intimates a certain affinitive incompatibility between them:

> LUCENTIO: The wisdom of your duty, fair Bianca,
> Hath cost me five hundred crowns since suppertime.
> BIANCA: The more fool you for laying on my duty.
> (5.2.131-33)[25]

The exchange suggests not simply financial loss and relational incompatibility but, as Bianca's retort insinuates, financial loss because of incompatibility. The pun on "duty" as social or political obligation, but also as debt or "thing due," emphasizes that Bianca is not the financial asset Lucentio believed her to be. While traditionally comic in its unfolding, then, their courtship disintegrates into a marriage relation where disparities in their respective theories of value prove costly; Bianca's "duty" is not something from which Lucentio ought to have expected profit. Indeed, wooing Bianca in disguise as Cambio ("Change"/"Exchange"), he is named by a kind of fungibility that the play's final scene exposes as ineffectual. The play of exchange may serve the purposes of romantic courtship, but once bound by the marital contract it loses much of its virtue; Lucentio has not come to know Bianca well enough to make a profitable wager on her behavior.

[25] The terms of the wager were actually one hundred crowns.

So far, so straight: an at times cruel "taming," a misogynist wager, a heterosexual marriage. What jolts us into remembering that something queerer is afoot is the looming presence (quite literally) of the Induction's Christopher Sly and his faux wife, a page-boy "dressed in all suits like a lady" (Ind.1.102), seated together on the upper stage watching the drama of Kate and Petruchio below—an entertainment that helps distract Sly from making further sexual passes at his boy-wife (Ind.2.110-32). Readers continue to debate how to understand this Induction, where the drunkard Sly is the butt of a jest by a wealthy lord who wants to make Sly believe himself a lord, in relation to the rest of the play.[26] What I want to stress is that there is no Induction here and remainder of the play there, as if the two are disparate parts that need to be wrested back together.[27] Rather, with Sly and the crossdressed Bartholomew seated above the action of *Shrew*, always in sight of the playhouse spectator even if neither has any speaking lines after the first scene, there is an insistent way in which the Induction is not just a frame narrative but rather the opening scene of one continuous play. Assuming Sly and the page do remain onstage through the entire play—and it seems they do, since they "*sit and mark*" (SD)—then they are in fact the most visible characters of the entire show, a drunkard who thinks he's a lord and a boy who is pretending to be his wife for the gratification of the real lord: "I know the boy will well usurp the grace, / Voice, gait, and action of a gentlewoman. / I long to hear him call the drunkard husband" (Ind.1.127-29).

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[26] Nearly every analysis of *Shrew* must broach this question in some way or another; it is a tricky enough problem that most modern versions of the play cut the Induction entirely. Despite the multiple approaches, readers both in the heyday of performance theory and since have understood the Induction's treatment of performativity as a deconstructive maneuver that exposes class and gender as socially constructed. As Barbara Hodgson succinctly puts it, "the Induction teaches that there is no such thing as discrete sexed or classed identity" ("Katherina Bound; or, Play(K)ating the Strictures of Everyday Life," *PMLA* 107 [1992]: 540). I am aware of few readings, however, that expound on the Induction's homoeroticism apart from the theatrical history of boy-actors or understand this element as fully imbricated with the class joke on Sly.

[27] Harold Bloom remarks that, "Though skillfully written, the Induction would serve half a dozen other comedies by Shakespeare as well or as badly as it coheres with the *Shrew*. Critical ingenuity has proposed several schemes creating analogies between Christopher Sly and Petruchio, but I am one of the unpersuaded" (*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* [New York: Riverhead Books, 1998], 28). I agree with Bloom that the Induction should not be taken as analogical for the rest of the play—to do so is to oversimplify both—but I resist the notion that it could be lifted from *Shrew* and appended willy-nilly to other comedies, as if it offers nothing more specific than a store of generic tropes.

Boys dressed as women were, of course, a conventional feature of the English stage. But this is one of only two plays in the Shakespearean canon where a male *character* crossdresses as a woman (the only other is Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*); it is much more typical for Shakespeare's heroines to crossdress as men.[28] Critics have usually read female-to-male (FTM) crossdressing as empowering the woman by giving her access to male privileges, while MTF crossdressing is more laden with phobias about deviancy, effeminacy, sodomy, and the like.[29] In *Shrew*'s Induction, however, far from anxiety or condemnation, there is an undeniably erotic charge in the lord's longing to see Bartholomew play the wife, which bleeds directly into the larger homosocial jest at the expense of Sly's class: "I long to hear him call the drunkard husband, / And how my men will stay themselves from laughter, / When they do homage to this simple peasant" (Ind.1.129-31). While the clauses here are part of one accumulating thought, the laughter appears to belong to the class mockery of doing homage to a tinker rather than to the sight of Bartholomew in women's clothes.[30] His convincing impersonation of a noble lady will, in fact, be the *coup de grace* of this jest at Sly's expense, so that the work of destabilizing gender and inviting homoerotic possibility is expressly enlisted toward the work of reinforcing class difference. And while there is surely also, in the lord's longing, an aesthetic desire to witness the artful or "grace[ful]" imitation

[28] Stephen Greenblatt and Kathleen McLuskie have both cast doubt on the queerness of this practice by arguing that its naturalization tended to reinforce the sex/gender binary for Elizabethan audiences. See McLuskie, "The Act, the Role, and the Actor: Boy Actresses on the Elizabethan Stage," *New Theatre Quarterly* 3 (1987): 120-30; and Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), 66-93.

[29] See Chess's overview of criticism on early modern crossdressing in *Male-to-Female Crossdressing in Early Modern English Literature: Gender, Performance, and Queer Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2016). It's important to note that while stage heroines were empowered by dressing as men, crossdressed women in English society were often treated with the same opprobrium of sexual deviancy as crossdressed men. See Jean E. Howard, "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.4 (1988): 418-40; and Tracey Sedinger, "'If Sight and Shape Be True': The Epistemology of Crossdressing on the London Stage," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.1 (1997): 63-79.

[30] While less attentive to the ways the Induction crosses class with gender, Chess similarly aims to "take male femininity seriously" by reading the scene's crossdressing "not just (or not only) as comedic farce but also as [an] authentic experiment[] in gender presentation" ("Male Femininity and Male-to-Female Crossdressing in Shakespeare's Plays and Poems," in *Queer Shakespeare*, 230).

of the connoisseur actor, the sheer gratuitousness of the gender trick speaks to an equally powerful homoerotic desire to watch a boy adopt the relational posture of a woman toward another man. The lord's chamber has been outfitted with "wanton pictures" (Ind.1.43), which the servingmen draw Sly's attention to and interpret for him in an attempt to rouse his libido. Meanwhile, the lord has instructed Bartholomew to "show her duty" to Sly "with kind embracements, tempting kisses, / And with declining head into his bosom" (Ind.1.113-15), to not only look and gesture like a noble lady but to inhabit the relational mode of wife, in real time, toward Sly—so that, by the time Bartholomew expresses regret at "being all this time abandoned from your bed" (Ind.2.111), Sly is more than ready for the act. That *Shrew* unfolds before this audience—an unwitting and socially-dislocated man and a boy who has been instructed to perform an eroticized femininity—complicates and indeed queers the seemingly straightforward heterosexuality of the *Shrew* narrative.[31]

Of course, if Bartholomew were to obey Sly's order to "undress you and come now to bed" (Ind.2.113), the game would be up. The whole point of the jest is to make Sly say it, confirming the boy-actor's virtuosity, yet the jest would be unraveled by the very thing it seeks to procure. Its logic is limited by the eventuality of its own self-collapsing, a situation explored throughout *Shrew* where violence, rather than sex, is often used to demarcate the limits of jest. When we first meet Bianca, for example, she is tied up for interrogation in what appears to be a sisterly prank: her captor, Katherine, demands to know "of all thy suitors here" which one "thou lov'st best" (2.1.8-9). Refusing to divulge an answer, Bianca insists,

Nay, then you jest, and now I well perceive

[31] In *A Pleasant Conceited Historie, called the taming of a Shrew* (of indeterminate authorship, entered into the Stationers' Register in 1594), the taming play, which Sly interprets as a dream, motivates him to go home and tame his own wife. But because we never hear from Shakespeare's Sly or Bartholomew again after the end of 1.1, we're left watching a boy performing a normative femininity watching Katherine perform a normative femininity; and in that sense it seems to be she who trains him, rather than Petruchio who trains Sly.

You have but jested with me all this while.
I prithee, sister Kate, untie my hands.

KATE: If that be jest, then all the rest was so. *[Strikes her.]*
(2.1.19-22)

This act of abuse leaves Bianca weeping (l. 24) as the hard physical fact of the strike not only puts an end to the "jest" but reveals, according to Kate, that none of it ever was jest to begin with. Kate will later strike Petruchio for making a joke about his tongue in her tail, ending their half-playful, half-hostile wooing exchange; Petruchio threatens to strike her back if she ever does it again. Unlike the midcentury folk ballad, where the almost unimaginable violence is itself the "merry jest," here it is violence that determines where jest ends, marking the divide between play and earnestness. But this is precisely what makes Petruchio's taming and Kate's response to it so abstruse, a site of "wonder" for those who behold it: the abusiveness of his treatment would, by the foregoing logic, seem to obviate the possibility of jest, and yet the comic ending leaves us with the feeling that perhaps this really was an elaborate jest all along. How far can the joke actually stretch? Petruchio might, indeed, be inadvertently teaching Kate how to be as abusive as he is, a possibility explored by John Fletcher's sequel *The Woman's Prize, or the Tamer Tamed* (1611) where Kate, apparently not tamed at all, is remembered as a marital torment to Petruchio. Like courtship and marriage, jest is therefore a contract in continual need of negotiation.[32] In this play it is delimited by violence and associated as much with work as with play, in a seeming pun on its homonym, gest: the trick on Sly "will be pastime passing excellent, / If it be husbanded with modesty," the lord tells his men (Ind.1.63-64). The improvisatory skills required to "manage" the

[32] Amy Smith writes that *Shrew*'s marriage "leaves Kate and Petruchio negotiating not only gender hierarchies but also love, sexuality, and parental demands. *The Taming*'s particular reiteration of marriage enacts a series of negotiations for power, none of which results in a marriage based on simple domination and submission or perfect egalitarianism" ("Performing Marriage with a Difference: Wooing, Wedding, and Bedding in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Comparative Drama* 36.3/4 [2002-3]: 289-320).

jest show the lord in an act of curation, an endeavor to define the borders of jest and to test its integrity.[33]

Kate's striking of Petruchio may put the brakes on that particular exchange, but it certainly does not signal the end of their courtship. Their verbal sparring is a play of flirtatious hostility, like the "merry war" between *Much Ado*'s Benedick and Beatrice, that is part of the negotiation of the erotic and marital contract.[34] Even before the climactic moment of Kate's final performance, the play's mystified onlookers comment in act 3 on the incredible parity between her and Petruchio:

> TRANIO: Of all mad matches never was the like.
> LUCENTIO: Mistress, what's your opinion of your sister?
> BIANCA: That being mad herself, she's madly mated.
> GREMIO: I warrant him, Petruchio is Kated.
>
> (3.2.233-36)

These two, in other words, fold into one another, their madcap methods distinct though alike in their extremity and violence, their beyond-the-pale nonnormativity. Without endorsing this violence, suggesting they are the same kind of violence, or reconstituting it all into the erotic play of BDSM, I think we are meant to see Petruchio and Katherine as, each in their own way, asocial, eccentric, and strange—both identified as "mad" (including by each other) at least eleven times throughout the play, and again in act 4's punning insinuation of lunacy as they agree to call the moon the sun and the sun the moon. Sly, too, for what it's worth, awaking in the rich chamber surrounded by servingmen calling him lord, demands, "would you make me mad?" (Ind.2.16), only to have his "strange lunacy" confirmed by the real lord (l. 27). Though the courtship of Kate and Petruchio is defined by hostility, it is through their very hostility that they stay aligned, "madly

[33] As Julia Lupton notes of these lines, "Shakespeare compares directing a play to husbanding an estate, both involving managerial skills and prudential judgment" ("Animal Husbands in *The Taming of the Shrew*," in *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pres, 2011], 38).
[34] As Greenblatt argues, "for Shakespeare friction is specifically associated with verbal wit; indeed at moments the plays seem to imply that erotic friction *originates* in the wantonness of language" (89, emphasis original).

mated" with one another. A social tie rooted in likeness and complementarity is formed between these otherwise unmoored and unruly individuals.

Here I echo Daniel Juan Gil's argument that, in early modernity, erotic relations between "unmoored selves" who could no longer depend on traditional kinship ties were reconstituted into our recognizably modern notions of intimacy grounded in privacy, individuality, and the home.[35] However, what makes *Shrew* queer is not that such kinship ties have faded away but that they are foregrounded only to then be rendered illegible. Kate and Petruchio's union, far from offering closure, destabilizes the kinship network it is meant to secure and thereby exposes the instability and riskiness of the marriage market. Observing their initial seduction, which culminates in their engagement, Gremio, Tranio, and Baptista speculate on what the union bodes for themselves:

> GREMIO: Was ever match clapped up so suddenly?
> BAPTISTA: Faith, gentlemen, now I play a merchant's part,
> And venture madly on a desperate mart.
> TRANIO: 'Twas a commodity lay fretting by you,
> 'Twill bring you gain, or perish on the seas.
> BAPTISTA: The gain I seek is quiet in the match.
> GREMIO: No doubt but he hath got a quiet catch.
> But now, Baptista, to your younger daughter […]
> (2.1.317-24)

While Baptista and Tranio try to think like merchants, weighing the risks and benefits of such a match, Gremio is more insistent that this is all a very bad deal for Baptista, insinuating that there is something other than love afoot in this "sudden" match before pivoting to his own interest in the now-eligible Bianca. The striking thing here is that all three businessmen have the same self-interest—to see Kate married off so that Bianca, too, can wed—and thus they all need Petruchio; yet when Petruchio arrives, he brings not security but ambivalence, a "desperate mart" or uncertain market that Baptista feels even himself "mad" for entering. Their mad match has become his, the

[35] Daniel Juan Gil, *Before Intimacy: Asocial Sexuality in Early Modern England* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006), xii.

web of relations between them now even flimsier and more vulnerable than they were before. With the Sly/Bartholomew "marriage" perched overhead, itself a fraught jest that performs erotic work through lampooning the aspirational working class, we enter this entanglement of queer relationality with capital flow. (Sly fancies himself not a "rogue" who owes debts to the tavern hostess with whom he quarrels at the scene's opening, but a descendant of "Richard Conqueror" [Ind.1.3-4].[36]) Petruchio's own friends are surprised by his intent to "wive it wealthily" no matter the relational cost, struggling to parse his jesting from his sincerity. "[S]ince we are stepped thus far in," says Hortensio after realizing how serious Petruchio is, "I will continue that I broached in jest. / I can, Petruchio, help thee to a wife." He warns that "her only fault…Is that she is intolerable curst, / And shrewd, and froward," but to no avail: "Hortensio, peace," Petruchio responds, "Thou know'st not gold's effect. / Tell me her father's name, and 'tis enough" (1.2.80-91).

What *is* gold's effect, and why is Petruchio the only one who seems to "know" it? Gold's effect is, of course, its desirability as medium of exchange, and there is perhaps no clearer affirmation in the play than here of the woman's reduction to an object of exchange under its sign; she has not even yet been named, her name immaterial without her father's, invisible but for his wealth.[37] But gold's effect also seems to be to *produce* erotic desire. Learning that the father in question is Baptista Minola and the daughter Katherina, Petruchio responds: "I know her father, though I know not her, / And he knew my deceasèd father well. / I will not sleep, Hortensio, till I see her" (ll. 98-100). The rapid pivot from this recollection of male kinship networks to the

[36] He means, of course, William.

[37] On men's exchange of women see Gayle Rubin's foundational essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly View Press, 1975), 157-210; and Luce Irigaray's extension of these concepts in "Women on the Market," in *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985). For the early modern context see Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1994); and, more specific to *Shrew*, Karen Newman, "Renaissance Family Politics and *The Taming of the Shrew*," in *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), 35-50.

expression of restless desire for Baptista's daughter is telling. Though Petruchio was already determined to marry into wealth, it is not until hearing these names—not, that is, until he is able to locate himself imaginatively within *this* relational network—that he begins to sound more like the traditional Petrarchan lover, Kate's wealth now only the implicit object of his desire and her person the explicit. It's surely important that Kate's wealth comes conveniently packaged in a kinship network of some familiarity to Petruchio, since the fact is repeated through the first couple scenes; that Petruchio's father Antonio knew Baptista "well" is also affirmed by Baptista at 2.1.70, and by Petruchio, again, at 2.1.114: "You knew my father well, and in him me." Commercial networks in the early modern Mediterranean, and particularly in the Republic of Venice, remained kinship-based longer than we usually allow, as Maria Fusaro has recently argued, the transition to the placeless market of depersonalized, interorganizational relations more gradual than we tend to treat them.[38] What makes *Shrew* interesting is that, in spite of these kinship ties, Petruchio's desire for Kate remains illegible to everyone (including Baptista), even to those aware of Petruchio's bald financial motive. The Lucentio-Bianca plot culminates in a false imitation of kinship, with the pedant disguised as Lucentio's father Vincentio in order to deceive Baptista, but it nevertheless ends with greater clarity than the mystifying Petruchio-Kate performance, where kinship ties based on "well"-knowing have been dislocated into the volatility of a "desperate mart." Here is a desire that seems to resist explanation, forged in gold and legitimated by preexisting kinship networks, yet not fully extensive with either one. This amatory play achieves an "effect" all its own.

Let's return, then, to the wager, the most expressly mystifying moment of the play, where Kate and Petruchio's victory proves their marriage both a lucrative and a complementary

[38] See Maria Fusaro, "Cooperating Mercantile Networks in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *The Economic History Review* 65.2 (2012): 701-18. For the placeless market see Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).

enterprise. Kate's paean to wifely submission at the end of the play has been variously read as sincere, grudging, strategic, parodic. The closer to parody, we feel in our postfeminist moment—the more it could be said to resemble "jest"—the better, since this permits easier recovery from the misogyny the speech otherwise appears to endorse. My own reading of this scene veers in this direction of what is sometimes pejoratively identified with revisionist history, but I'd like to propose another, admittedly speculative, possibility: that Kate is not acting alone but is actually in on the wager, that she has plotted with her husband offstage and behind the scenes to win the money. The audience, of course, never sees such a plot occur, but I think there is reason to read it between-the-lines. For one, Petruchio announces the wager just after the women have left the room and are, presumably, out of earshot, and it matters that he is the one to announce it. In the Danish folktale "The Most Obedient Wife," the first shrew-taming tale to introduce a financial prize, it is the shrew's father rather than her husband who comes up with the contest, obviating the possibility for such a spousal conspiracy.[39] That Shakespeare both takes up the financial element and puts the idea of the wager in the mouth of Petruchio provides the condition of possibility for reading this scene in terms of fully agentic genderplay, where Kate performs wifely fidelity and Petruchio masculine bravado, to the amazement of their audience and for their own enrichment.

"Sir, my mistress sends you word that she is busy and she cannot come," Biondello reports to Hortensio after he calls for the widow (5.2.85). Lucentio receives an even sharper denial from Bianca: "She says you have some goodly jest in hand. She will not come. She bids you come to her" (l. 95). Kate, the only wife who comes at her husband's beckoning, is sent back to retrieve the other wives, whom she goes on to lecture at only the slightest prompting from Petruchio:

[39] For a summary of this Danish version by Sven Grundtvig (1902), see Charlotte Artese, "'Tell Thou the Tale': Shakespeare's Taming of Folktales in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Folklore* 120.3 (2009): 317-26. For the Danish tale's introduction of financial incentive, see Jan Harold Brunvand, "The Folktale Origin of *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 17.4 (1966): 352.

"Katherine, I charge thee tell these headstrong women / What duty they owe their lords and husbands" (ll. 134-35). The finely-crafted speech she then delivers is by far the longest in the play, and it's not entirely clear what she thinks is happening in this moment if she knows nothing of the wager, or indeed of any of the circumstances of the moment. Why the passion, the speech that appears to begin with yelling ("Fie, fie!"), when Kate has no panoptic view of the situation, no awareness that the other wives have done anything more egregious than "sit conferring by the parlor fire" (l. 106), as she herself had reported, and that she has been sent to fetch them? Her virtuoso performance on wifely "duty" is followed immediately by Petruchio's triumphant, almost too-ready, outcry: "Why, there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate" (l. 184). There is something in the pacing of these climactic moments that suggests rehearsal, and something more than Petruchio's characteristic braggadocio in his promise "Nay, I will win my wager better yet" (l. 120) *after* he has already won not only the agreed-upon sum of the wager but also, from an astonished Baptista, a second dowry:

> The wager thou hast won, and I will add
> Unto their losses twenty thousand crowns,
> Another dowry to another daughter,
> For she is changed as she had never been.
> (5.2.116-19)[40]

All it took for Baptista to offer this enormous new sum was for Kate to come into the room when called; she had not even delivered her final speech yet. What, then, does Petruchio have left to win after this quite shocking double payment, resulting in a grand total in earnings of 20,200 crowns (besides the initial dowry) or, in today's currency, over £865,000?[41] Financially speaking, nothing

[40] For a reading of Petruchio as a type from the "lost comic subgenre [of] braggart courtship," see Philip D. Collington, "'A Mad-Cap Ruffian and a Swearing Jack': Braggart Courtship from *Miles Gloriosus* to *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Early Theatre* 19.1 (2016): 81-112.

[41] I obtained this number from the "Currency converter: 1270-2017" on The National Archives' website, based on the ratio 1 crown = ¼ of a pound and on approximations of what one pound was worth in 1590.

at all: no more money changes hands, making Kate's speech, strictly speaking within the terms of the wager, unnecessary. Though seemingly unfazed by Baptista's generosity, Petruchio could not have anticipated these additional earnings and thus proceeds as planned, with Kate performing very much on cue though perhaps now a bit out of time. Given this sequence of events and potential slip of the tongue by Petruchio, I think there is a convincing case to be made that Petruchio and Kate act here as co-conspirators in a financial scheme that ends up profiting even more handsomely than either of them could have anticipated.

Even if we are unwilling to grant this, it remains the case that Kate does exactly what Petruchio wagers she will do, proving their complementarity and confirming Petruchio's savviness as a financial speculator. However she may have intended her speech, whether parodically or (God forbid) sincerely, Kate is by now so enmeshed with Petruchio, so predictable, that he can be confident entering the space of financial vulnerability that spells the downfall of the other men. It would be precisely this silence, the gap between them that is yet filled as predicted, that would confirm their mysterious affinity, proving mysterious even perhaps to themselves. In any case, it is a queer affinity in heterosexual guise, dressed up the way Bartholomew is dressed for Sly, but really for the lord: a mercantile marriage between a man who performs a certain version of husband and a woman who performs a certain version of wife for an audience, for their own mutual enrichment. This is a model not of queer embodiment or desire but of queer relationality: a queering of the legible heterosexual dyad under mercantile demand and the vagaries of those willing to take on its risks. Just a few years later, *The Merchant of Venice* will extend this queer mercantilism into a fully queer imaginary of triangulated relations.

II. QUEER NETWORKING IN *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

After their happy engagement is marred by news of Antonio's financial disaster at sea and his forfeited bond with Shylock, Portia utters this somewhat strange statement to her new fiancée, Bassanio: "Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear" (3.2.312). What makes this strange is that, on its face, the reverse holds true: it is Portia that has been dearly bought by Bassanio, who needed Antonio's wealth to have any hope of courting her. "In Belmont is a lady richly left….Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth," Bassanio tells Antonio at the beginning of the play (1.1.160-66). Perhaps Portia's "buying" is a matter not of wealth but of other resources like time, or patience; perhaps she feels a glimmer of nostalgia for the other suitors who tried and failed for her hand. Or, concerned about Bassanio's "true friend" (3.2.307), it is possible that Portia means he's been dear bought not by herself but by Antonio, though she considers his default to Shylock a "petty debt" that can be repaid (by her) "twenty times over" (l. 306). Her cause-and-effect syntax ("since…I will") is a bald gesture to the financialization of affective bonds in early modern Venice, the total transformation of "love" into payment and vice versa, flagged as early as the play's opening scene when Bassanio says "To you Antonio / I owe the most in money and in love," making no distinction between the two (1.1.129-30). Antonio reciprocates by promising him, in equally parallel fashion, "[m]y purse, my person" (l. 137). The question thus persistently emerges throughout the play: who, exactly, is purchasing whom?

There is never a clear answer, and that is precisely the point. In a city notorious for its red light district, located in the main commercial hub of the Rialto where prostitution had operated legally since the mid-fourteenth century, the monetization of bodies was familiar. So were the linkages between prostitution and mercantilism: foreign merchants were a significant clientele for Venetian sex workers, and prostitution was likely taxed in the early sixteenth century to help fund

the city's Arsenale or shipyard.[42] Against this backdrop, *The Merchant of Venice* imagines both the transaction of bodies, flesh for/as payment (as in the Shylock/Antonio plot), but also stages a promiscuous entanglement of financial relations that both enrich and mystify the personal relations of affinity attached to them. By this I mean that, the more people become financially enmeshed (Bassanio needs Antonio's capital, who takes a loan from Shylock, to court Portia who ends up interceding for Antonio's forfeited bond, and so on), the more need there is for canny interpretation of the ever-evolving affinities engendered by financial rearrangement. For *Merchant* in particular, as its final act shows, such financial entanglement is productive of relations that are not merely mutable, but profoundly queer. Indeed, act 5 is a queer playground that rivals anything in the more oft-discussed queer imaginaria of *As You Like It* or *Twelfth Night*, an extension of the promiscuities of merchant capitalism itself.

To argue this well will require some careful outlining of terms. For the moment I point to a narrative trajectory that begins in act 3, scene 2 with Portia's first awareness of Bassanio's "true friend" Antonio, runs through the trial scene in act 4 where Bassanio promises to "sacrifice" Portia on Antonio's behalf, and ends in act 5 with Portia proudly announcing that Antonio's sunken cargoes—the disaster that necessitated his trial—are safe after all. Critics have tended to treat act 5 as narrative denouement with little interpretive value, a bit of comic fluff that follows on but has little truck with the real drama of the courtroom imbroglio between Antonio and Shylock. But the ring trick orchestrated by Portia and played alongside Nerissa is both an extension and an intensification of the play's interest in the interplay of financial and affective bonds. The trick is motivated by Portia's need to interpret and reconstitute her own social standing vis-à-vis Bassanio/

[42] For more on prostitution in premodern Venice, see Paula C. Clarke, "The Business of Prostitution in Early Renaissance Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 68.2 (2015): 419-64; and Saundra Weddle, "Mobility and Prostitution in Early Modern Venice," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14.1 (2019): 95-108.

Antonio in the wake of the former's declaration of love for the latter at the climactic moment of the trial, just before the pound of flesh is to be removed from Antonio's body. Bassanio's confession disrupts Portia's queer desire for triadic entanglement, expressed before the trial ever happens in terms of a "like proportion" between the three of them (3.4.14)—a disruption felt so intensively that Portia's effort to retriangulate herself into their affinitive pairing requires the entire (albeit comparatively short) fifth act of the play. Risky entanglement, developed in the play's maze of financial giving, loaning, hazard, and redemption, enables the proliferation of queer possibility as Bassanio/Antonio/Portia/Nerissa/Gratiano, through the symbolic handling of their rings, discuss (and, in one case, stage) cuckoldry, pederasty, orgiastic union, and something like a gay marriage.

Beyond the matter of credit, then—the question of who is creditable or "worthy," and who isn't—*Merchant*, like *Shrew*, is trying to work through an early capitalist temporality of speculative futurity that understands credit-relations not as fixed, self-evident, or even reliable, but as gameable, reconfigurable.[43] "I have within my mind / A thousand raw tricks of these bragging Jacks," Portia tells Nerissa, sounding a bit like Petruchio, as they plot to steal away to Venice disguised as men; "But come, I'll tell thee all my whole device" (3.4.75-80). The play is intent on figuring this speculative gamesmanship in terms of a queer imaginary even before the extended ring trick of acts 4 and 5. "I'll hold thee any wager," Portia tells Nerissa,

> When we are both accoutered like young men,
> I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
> And wear my dagger with the braver grace,
> And speak between the change of man and boy,
> With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps
> Into a manly stride, and speak of frays
> Like a fine bragging youth. And tell quaint lies
> How honorable ladies sought my love […]
>
> (3.4.61-69)

[43] I build here from the work of Lorna Hutson, who argues that the "pleasurable, flirtatious quality of uncertainty" is what motivates the lending of "assurances" in *Merchant*; assurance is paradoxically granted to those who make themselves most vulnerable (*The Usurer's Daughter*, 235).

In part a metatheatrical joke in the mouth of the boy-actor playing Portia, these lines imagine a homosocial and potentially homophiliac "wager" between Portia and Nerissa on who will "prove the prettier fellow," both in ability to imitate the speech and gait of an adolescent male youth and in the potential to attract "honorable ladies" (and perhaps also, as Eve Sedgwick might point out, the male rivals for these ladies). Nerissa, in particular, will in act 5 play on the slippages "between the change of man and boy" that Portia introduces here, but I draw attention to the passage now in order to suggest the priority of a queer imaginary within the entangled financial and affective structures of early capitalism. Just as early modern financial discourse imagines usury as a kind of breeding, and the act of counterfeit as homologous to sodomy, *Merchant* suggests that risky or speculative venture demands a degree of financial interdependency that queers relations.

We find a similar phenomenon in the Sonnets, whose speaker scolds his love interest in sonnet 4 as a "profitless usurer" for "unthrift[il]y" "spend[ing]" his "beauty's legacy" upon himself. Part of what makes this sonnet sequence queer is not only the homoerotic relationship between its presumably male speaker and his addressee, the fair youth, but the paradoxical figuring of this desire in the terms of heterosexual reproduction.[44] While the Sonnets as a sequence use any number of conceits to figure this relation, it is the economic conceit that most neatly captures the queerness of the speaker's bid, since it makes a financialized heterosexuality built on "legacy" the precondition for a homoerotic imaginary that "spends" desire. The moves here are even knottier than they may appear, since, as Valerie Traub points out, for the Sonnets "heteroeroticism becomes distinctly unpleasurable" "once marriage, reproduction, and inheritance of name and property are

[44] As Eve Sedgwick puts it in her reading of the Sonnets, "On the whole, the project of instilling in the fair youth a socialized, heterosexual identity is conducted firmly under the aspect of male relationships and solicitations" ("Swan in Love: The Example of Shakespeare's Sonnets," in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985], 34).

no longer the goal," so that authentic desire is figured precisely as *free* of economic imperative.[45] Further, the sonnet's mixed language of mercantile "traffic" as well as property inheritance (its own kind of category confusion) is, it turns out, really interested in the transfer not of money or property but of immaterial beauty. Unlike the preceding sonnets, which are about the genetic reproduction of the young man's face in a bodily child, sonnet 4 seeks the reproduction of (male) beauty as such, a concern that is nonetheless vigorously financialized ("unthrifty loveliness," and so on) and opens the young man's body to the traffic of the world. The sonnet, that is to say, becomes a queer Mobius strip of homosexual desire routed through a materialized heterosexuality which then folds back upon a materialized homosexuality in the form of a child that resembles the queer object of desire. "Traffic" operates as a euphemism for sexual intercourse but also as an acknowledgement of the kinds of socioeconomic relations into which the fair youth must enter in order to satisfy the speaker's queer desire. If masturbatory self-containment ("traffic with thyself alone") is the stance against which the speaker pushes in the first 17 sonnets, mercantile exchange (traffic with others) is imagined as *the* mode of entry into a world of fecund relationality. The sonnet formally reifies this move against self-containment in its liberal use of the interrogative: "Why dost thou spend"; "why dost thou use"; "What acceptable audit canst thou leave?", as if throwing the incontrovertibility of economic demand into the addressee's face.

This financial imaginary of a fecund futurity, normally associated with heterosexual reproduction, is here what makes possible the perpetuation of a homoerotic desire that queerly uses heterosexuality as its surrogate. In this, it becomes clearer that the sonnet is articulating much the same notion of promiscuous financial transfer that we come to find in *Merchant*:

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[45] Traub, "Sex without Issue: Sodomy, Reproduction, and Signification in Shakespeare's Sonnets," in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 438. David Hawkes notes in a similar vein that "if reproductive sex is usurious, as the *Sonnets* suggest, then according to traditional morality it is in fact *un*natural" (*Idols of the Marketplace*, 105).

> Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend,
> And being frank she lends to those are free:
> Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse
> The bounteous largess given thee to give?
>
> (sonnet 4, lines 3-6)

While I don't mean to use "promiscuous" in an exclusively sexual sense, it does bear noticing that Nature's "frank[ness]" is charged with both financial and sexual meaning. For both the Sonnets and for *Merchant*, financial liberality often intimates sexual desire. While this in itself is not implicitly queer, the eventual opening of this liberality to a wider social network can be figured in terms of a kind of financial polyamory. Antonio's munificence toward Bassanio—"My purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlocked to your occasions" (1.1.138-39)—is anticipated in Nature's "bounteous largess," which gives to the young man in order to give to the world, just as Antonio's capital will flow from himself through Bassanio toward Portia (and, ultimately, back to Bassanio in the transfer of Portia's estate, and then back to Antonio to redeem his shipwrecked goods). Purse strings connect to heartstrings not just in the sense that one person's wealth awakens another's desire for them, but in the sense that networks of financial transfer can "pick up" or recruit additional affinitive bonds between people who otherwise would have remained unknown to each other.

Throughout *Merchant*, then, new affinitive bonds are created, duplicated, and triplicated by financial entanglement. Bassanio's success at the casket game, for example, means not only his engagement to Portia but also Gratiano's engagement to Nerissa. "You saw the mistress, I beheld the maid," says Gratiano; "Your fortune stood upon the caskets there, / And so did mine too, as the matter falls" (3.2.199-203). He then wagers one thousand ducats that he and Nerissa will be the first couple to produce a son (l. 214). The economic model staged throughout the play is not one simply of property or asset transfer normally associated with heterosexual marriage, but one

of profitable fecundity enabled by risk-taking (Antonio's risky ventures by sea; a courtship game that asks its participant to "give and hazard all he hath"; Gratiano's wager). To hazard for another not only demonstrates true love or affinity but also ends up producing more than ever anticipated, a return on investment in excess of the investment made, as we also saw in *Shrew*. *Merchant* thus aligns speculative risk with reproductive futurity, imagining friendship and companionate marriage alike as a kind of economic partnership.

Things become loopier, however, when Portia discovers that her betrothed has already "engaged [him]self to a dear friend" (3.2.260), the "dearest friend to me, the kindest man, / The best conditioned...in Italy" (ll. 291-95). Portia's eagerness to ransom this "dear friend" (l. 290) from trouble is motivated not only by the dear-boughtness of Bassanio but also from Portia's own curious insertion of herself into his bond with Antonio, an act of triangulated desire that is fundamentally queer by the rubrics of early modern amity:

> in companions
> That do converse and waste the time together,
> Whose souls do bear an egal yoke of love,
> There must be needs a like proportion
> Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit,
> Which makes me think that this Antonio,
> Being the bosom lover of my lord,
> Must needs be like my lord. If it be so,
> *How little is the cost I have bestowed*
> *In purchasing the semblance of my soul*
> From out the state of hellish cruelty.
> (3.4.11-21, emphasis mine)

If Antonio is "like" Bassanio, and if Bassanio is "half" of Portia (3.2.247), then Antonio is like Portia—and not just like her, but, in Portia's more intensifying language, the very semblance of her soul. The transitive, syllogistic reasoning of Portia's claim, which opens dyadic relation into a triadic one, is in large part what makes this relation queer. As a bevy of scholarship on early modern friendship has pointed out, idealized friendship in the classical tradition of Aristotle and

Cicero is homosocial in almost every sense of the word: between men; between men of the same social class; between men of similar ability, virtue, disposition; between *two* men. This numerical element remained crucial to early modern conceptions of friendship: as Michel de Montaigne, Thomas Breme, and others believed, "the number of friends causeth great importunity, the which causeth *perfect amity* to diminish."[46] Two remained a privileged quantity in the figuring of early modern English amity, not least as a reflection of the binary logic of marriage. Early modern writers often found themselves in a conceptual tangle when they analogized marriage and friendship while needing to maintain friendship's gendered parity against marriage's sexual disparity.[47] And, of course, with the household itself conceived so regularly as a microcosm of the state, the question of quantity (whether in marriage or friendship) remained a deeply political one, articulated by Henry Turner as "the problem of the more-than-one."[48] But Portia posits no distinction between the two: *friendship* and *marriage* never enter her calculus, which figures Antonio and Bassanio both as "companions" and as "bosom lover[s]" whose "egal yoke of love" also includes herself.[49]

It is not just the opening of the dyad into a triad that queers the relation, but also Portia's intensification of the "like proportion" of friendly affinity into the marital-sounding "semblance of my soul," which converts the language of mathematics into the language of love. The speech sounds like standard early modern discourse of friendship until we reach its final lines, where

[46] Quoted in Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, 18. The quotation is from Thomas Breme's 1584 *The Mirrour of Friendship*.
[47] For more on this see Constance Furey, "Bound by Likeness: Vives and Erasmus on Marriage and Friendship," in *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700*, ed. Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López, and Lorna Hutson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).
[48] Henry S. Turner, "The Problem of the More-than-One: Friendship, Calculation, and Political Association in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.4 (2006): 413-42.
[49] Here I build off John Garrison's argument that *Merchant*, far from being "an encomium to dyadic friendship," instead "stages a multiplicity of overlapping bonds of amity between men" (*Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance* [New York: Routledge, 2014], 25). As my privileging of Portia emphasizes, these overlapping bonds are however not merely between men but extend to cross-gendered desire and identification.

Portia suddenly enters the equation on equal terms with the male homosocial dyad. Yet it is crucial that what enables her insouciant collapsing of the social and gender distinctions between friendship/marriage and male/female is her financial power: not only is Antonio "like" Bassanio and thus syllogistically like Portia, but he can be "purchased" by her at "little…cost." Antonio, financially ruined on Bassanio's behalf, will be redeemed by wealthy Portia, whose entry into their relation is facilitated by a quite un-"like proportion" of purchasing power. The paltriness of the three-thousand ducat sum, for Portia, actually emphasizes the disparity between her and the now-financially-ruined Antonio even as her syllogistic reasoning attempts to accomplish the opposite. This is, perhaps, one reason why she cuts her own discourse short: "This comes too near the praising of myself, / Therefore no more of it" (3.4.22-23). The "self" being praised here is the self that has the means to purchase another out of "hell," a Christological comparison that puts Antonio into Portia's debt when what she means to underscore is their radical sameness and equivalency. Her effort to de-financialize the generosity that renders her unlike Bassanio (who is financially "worse than nothing" [3.2.259]) or Antonio, even as it enables her entry into their relation, registers a certain anxiety about the total collapsing of financial and affinitive relations in Venice/Belmont; and yet it is the discourse of affinity itself, queered into triadic entanglement, that justifies her financial intervention in the first place.

The erotic triangle is, of course, a deeply archetypal form, one that makes "graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment," as Sedgwick puts it in *Between Men*.[50] However, as this triangle—normally structured on two male suitors' rivalry for the same woman—is thrust into the period of mercantilist trade, its gendered codes are reworked to accommodate the imperatives of capital

[50] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 27.

flow. If, as Sedgwick points out, male homosocial rivalry often exposes or produces its own homoerotics, in the era of capital it is the power to wield money—to ransom, to purchase, to dole out loans—that determines the particular shape of triangulation and unlocks new queer potential. This is not to say that anyone with financial power is welcomed into nonnormative forms of relationality, as the Shylock plot makes clear. Yet even here the play entertains a certain masochistic erotics of cross-confessional relation as Shylock imagines "an equal pound / Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken / In what part of your body it pleaseth me" (1.3.142-44).[51] Even so, Shylock's quasi-erotic fantasy of dismemberment is expressly condemned as the negative other of Christian corporation. Indeed, by the end of the play the Christians have become a multi-membered body, enabled in no small measure by their conception of financial risk-taking and intercession as a shared enterprise. Amy Greenstadt, drawing from James Shapiro and others, also reads Shylock's terms as encoding, potentially, a fantasy of castration or circumcision, but emphasizes that Antonio hopes to be of "kind" with Shylock and that circumcision thus "haunts [the play] as a threat but also as a promise."[52] As I read it, this gives *Merchant* too much credit for seeking to incorporate rather than expel the Jewish usurer from its model of queer kinship. This expulsion reaches its final crescendo at the top of act 5 when Lorenzo, flirting with Jessica under the Belmont moonlight, remarks that

> In such a night
> Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,
> And with an unthrift love did run from Venice,
> As far as Belmont.
>
> (5.1.14-17)

[51] For a sustained reading of masochism in the play, see Drew Daniel, "'Let me have judgement, and the Jew his will': Melancholy Epistemology and Masochistic Fantasy in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61.2 (2010): 206-34. I agree with Daniel that "we can hear a desire at work in Shylock's discourse about Antonio's body and its uses," even if this desire "registers more as hunger than as sexual lust" (223).
[52] Amy Greenstadt, "The Kindest Cut: Circumcision and Queer Kinship in *The Merchant of Venice*," *ELH* 80.4 (2013): 948.

Lorenzo figures Jessica's escape from her Jewish father explicitly in terms of overspending, her promiscuous breaking of racial and confessional divides to love a Christian directly analogous to financial profligacy. Even though the whole financial schema of the play hinges on Shylock's capacity to loan money while Antonio's wealth is tied up at sea, he has to be excluded from participation in its affinitive networks. Shylock's "well-won thrift, / Which [Antonio] calls interest" (1.3.44-45) now devastated by Portia/Balthasar, Jessica completes her initiation into Christianity by unthriftily fleeing to Belmont. Relations with Shylock are always under bond and contract, not giving, as Antonio means to give to Bassanio and Portia to Antonio—even if this ostensibly altruistic giving really comes with the stipulation of the recipient's having been "dear bought" by the giver. These acts of sharing, symbolically represented by the ring-transfers of acts 4 and 5, puts (Christian) financial arrangement at the helm of a queer social imaginary by promiscuously entangling body and payment, person and purchasing power—and the more "unthrift," the better. In the figure of Portia especially, the play of desire becomes indistinguishable from the play of capital.

However, she is about to experience a rude awakening. At the scene of Antonio's trial, Bassanio attempts to ransom his friend by offering Shylock six thousand ducats, or twice the value of the original bond. Shylock, however, arguing from the principles of contract law rather than financial gain, rejects the offer, prompting the outcry from Bassanio:

> Antonio, I am married to a wife
> Which is as dear to me as life itself,
> But life itself, my wife, and all the world
> Are not with me esteemed above thy life.
> I would lose all, I sacrifice them all
> Here to this devil, to deliver you.
>
> (4.1.279-84)

Until this point Bassanio had made no clear distinction between his love for Antonio and his love for Portia. As Antonio is readied for the knife, Bassanio is confronted for the first time with the failure of financial power to redeem a friend, prompting him to confess a love for Antonio that is seemingly superior to his love for Portia. In the breakdown of the structures of financial entanglement that had enabled perfect "semblance" and "like proportion" between multiple actors, Bassanio reverts to a dyadic and exclusive model of relationality that is also a privileging of the male homosocial/erotic bond over heterosexual marriage. Portia's wry comment—"Your wife would give you little thanks for that, / If she were by to hear you make the offer" (ll. 285-86)—comically understates the pain of rupture that Bassanio's confession of dyadic love inflicts on her model of equivalent triadic union. Yet her request for Bassanio's wedding ring, made while still in disguise as Balthasar, is an interpretive test that suggests the extent to which she remains troubled by this rupture. Will Bassanio part with this sacred symbol of their marital oath, transforming that symbolic object into a profanely economic medium of payment for services rendered?

As it turns out, yes; and Gratiano does the same with Nerissa's ring, giving it to Balthasar's clerk (who is, of course, Nerissa in disguise). At first reluctant to part with the ring, Bassanio is easily persuaded the moment Antonio steps in: "Let his deservings and my love withal / Be valued against your wife's commandment," Antonio instructs (4.1.447-48), whereon Bassanio instantly relinquishes the ring to Balthasar. Their own rings in hand, Portia and Nerissa are thus prepared for the trick that fills the entirety of act 5. "We shall have old swearing," Portia tells Nerissa, "That they did give the rings away to men, / But we'll outface them, and outswear them too" (4.2.15-17). The insinuation of homosexual motive in Portia's "to men" sits deliciously alongside her ludic intent to, with Nerissa, "outface" and "outswear" their husbands; in the breakdown of idealized

triangulated affinity, gendered relations have become a kind of Lysistratan competition. But this is not quite the contest of heterosexual marriage versus homosocial kinship that nearly every reading of the play has assumed. Portia's intent, rather, is not to steal Bassanio back from Antonio but to recapture the "like proportion" between the three of them she had celebrated in act 3. Her actual conducting of the ring scandal in act 5 is only playfully combative, and it thus generates, rather than forecloses, further queer possibilities, with Portia emerging as the play's most calculating (and thus, in this merchant world, most socially able) figure. "A substitute shines brightly as a king / Until a king be by," she tells Nerissa on their return to Belmont, "and then his state / Empties itself" (5.1.93-95). She recycles the same metaphor of proportion and worth several times but always leaves its referents tantalizingly unidentified, as if to suggest that power relations are always inherently reconfigurable.

Worth is indeed the play's governing socioeconomic concern, tied not just to the issue of creditability but also of risk-taking or hazarding. "Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth," Bassanio says in lauding Portia's virtues; "O my Antonio, had I but the means / To hold a rival place with one of [her suitors]…I should questionless be fortunate" (1.1.172-75). But the casket game through which these suitors compete for Portia's hand problematizes the issue of worth by asking whether risk (the projection of a self into the future) or eminence (others' recognition of the self) is the truer measure of worth. Of all Portia's suitors, the Prince of Morocco takes what is arguably the most clear-headed approach to the question, reasoning that the decision to risk *proves* both the eminence or worthiness of the risk-taker and the value of the thing to be obtained. At first worried that "blind fortune" may cause him to "miss that which one unworthier may attain," like Hercules losing a game of dice to Lichas (2.1.32-37), Morocco eliminates the lead casket by arguing that lead is unworthy the act of risk-taking that the casket game demands:

What says this leaden casket?
"Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath."
Must give, for what? For lead, hazard for lead?
This casket threatens men that hazard all
Do it in hope of fair advantages.
A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross.
I'll then nor give nor hazard aught for lead.
(2.7.15-21)

The terms of the casket game are risky indeed: if the suitor chooses correctly, he marries Portia and inherits her enormous dowry; but if he chooses wrongly, he must swear "never to speak to lady afterward / In way of marriage" (2.1.41-42). To choose wrongly, to lose the gamble, would mean not only the preclusion of Portia and all her wealth but also the foreclosure of reproductive heterosexual linearity altogether. There is a queer element, then, stuffed into the logic of the casket game, which demands the potential relinquishing of heterosexual pairing in its only socially-reproductive form. Morocco shrewdly reflects on these risky stakes but errs in conflating the material worth of the caskets with the social value of himself and Portia, choosing the gold casket on the assumption of an equivalence between personal desirability and monetary gain (ll. 37-38, 52-55). The silver casket, similarly, entraps the Prince of Aragon who believes that he, more than the "barbarous multitudes," "deserves" Portia (2.9.32-35). Only Bassanio, who knows that "the world is still deceived with ornament" (3.2.75), looks beyond the collapsing of personal into financial worth—even though it is precisely this collapsing or conflation that drives nearly every social relation in the play.

Indeed, it is remarkable that Bassanio lands on the correct casket without reflecting at all on the terms of its bid (giving or hazarding) like Morocco does. Yet what he does get right is that social relations, whether in law, religion, or ethics, are demystified when one looks past their glittering outer casements (3.2.76-83), a maxim that had also been articulated earlier in the play by Antonio warning him about (in his view) Shylock's misinterpretation of Scripture: "Mark you

this, Bassanio…what a goodly outside falsehood hath" (1.3.91-96). This familiar surface/depth distinction acquires special significance for the risk-taking merchant, who must not only be canny about the worthiness or credit of his borrowers and lenders but must also know how to properly triangulate these mercantile relations with other contractual obligations. Bassanio's failure to do so, at least in Portia's mind, is what she takes him to task for in act 5: "If you had known the virtue of the ring, / Or half her worthiness that gave the ring, / Or your own honor to contain the ring, / You would not then have parted with the ring" (5.1.199-202). Her speech is quite similar, both in form and substance, to one Lorenzo had delivered to her after Bassanio left Belmont to deal with Antonio's crisis:

> But if you knew to whom you show this honor,
> How true a gentleman you send relief,
> How dear a lover of my lord your husband,
> I know you would be prouder of the work
> Than customary bounty can enforce you.
> (3.4.5-9)

In both formulations, the ability to read other people and determine their social worth enables suitable figuration of one's own worth, producing an epistemology of social knowledge that is also bound to the economic question of reciprocal obligation. I follow Turner in framing this not as an issue of credit per se but of calculation or risky prediction: "How would we calculate differences among persons who might be comparable to or 'worthy' of one another, especially when the question is choosing between friends or deciding whether or not to act on behalf of another?" Turner asks.[53] *Merchant* uses its final act to sort these questions, but the queer imaginary it ends up unleashing complicates and enriches the problem of social legibility even further.

While most readers of the play, including Turner, see in its final act the triumph of marriage over friendship, marital "heterophilia" over "the homophilia that motivated classical citizenship,"

[53] Turner, 428.

I argue that the final act with its ring-trick destabilizes the marital bond—and, with it, social relations more broadly—in ways that few of Shakespeare's other comic plots do.[54] Indeed, as Portia not only demystifies the courtroom disguise plot but also delivers the "better news" to Antonio that "three of your argosies / Are richly come to harbor suddenly" (5.1.274-77), she successfully retriangulates herself into queer relation with Bassanio and Antonio by proving her social worth. Act 5's comic anagnorises, the revelation of Portia's virtuosity as both play-actor and financial redeemer, allows Portia to ingeniously reingratiate herself with her wayward husband by forcing him to reingratiate himself with her over the matter of the ring. Eliciting at first their husbands' pleading and then their admiration, Portia and Nerissa emerge as the play's most powerful negotiators, as Jeffrey Masten notices in his comment on "Portia's power as mortgage (and marriage) broker."[55] This ends up being more than a traditionally comic women-on-top or battle-of-the-sexes schema, though it is also that. Rather, *Merchant* suggests that relations of worth can be reimagined and recontextualized (played around with) by those who wield objects of worth—for most of the play money, but for act 5 the wedding ring which functions as object of both financial and social value.

"I'll die for't, but some woman had the ring!" Portia proclaims (5.1.208) shortly before promising to sleep with the (male) doctor to whom Bassanio says he gave the ring: "I will become as liberal as you, / I'll not deny him anything I have, / No, not my body, nor my husband's bed" (ll. 226-28). With economic liberality again imagined as consonant with sexual promiscuity, Portia is able to make the ring "mean" a number of different, and mutually contradictory, relational possibilities: it can represent, all at once, a new heteroerotic affinity between Bassanio and "some woman," a new relation (perhaps marital, perhaps adulterous) between Portia and the doctor, or

[54] Turner, 433.
[55] Masten, *Queer Philologies*, 227.

(as Bassanio insists, and as Portia secretly knows to be true) a gift or payment for legal service—perhaps erotically charged, as Portia's "to men" had insinuated, or perhaps not. In any case, Portia meant it when she told Nerissa they would "outface" their husbands, imagining any number of new faces in possession of the rings their husbands gave away. The face that Nerissa imagines is queerly marked by a certain refusal of gendered identification altogether:

> NERISSA: Gave it a judge's clerk! But well I know
> The clerk will ne'er wear hair on's face that had it.
> GRATIANO: He will, and if he live to be a man.
> NERISSA: Aye, if a woman live to be a man.
> (ll. 156-59)

Nerissa, of course, like Portia, is having fun with the knowledge that she herself took the ring while disguised as a boy, but the easy gender slippages imagined by both of them—you gave my wedding ring to a woman, you gave it to a man, you gave it to a woman who became a man—suggests that relations of affinity, circumscribed by exchange, can be reshaped as easily and as quickly as one can transfer money or a valuable object. And if the transfer of value signals a shifting of affinity, even a purely imagined transfer can still bring a relation into existence. This is an exercise in gaming that itself seems to entail homoerotic play, as explored in Michael Radford's 2004 film adaptation which has Portia and Nerissa kiss mid-scene.[56]

At last, Portia (partially) gives up the ruse after revealing the ring and claiming to have obtained it by sleeping with Balthasar, and Nerissa with his clerk, prompting the outcry from Gratiano: "[A]re we cuckolds ere we have deserved it?" (l. 265). Cuckoldry, then, would seem to represent the outer limit or breaking-point of this imaginary of multiplied affinities, as sex and violence do for jest at various moments throughout *Shrew*, except that Portia had already spoken its possibility into existence in her fantasy of sleeping with the doctor. And when the trick has been

[56] *The Merchant of Venice*, dir. Michael Radford (Sony Picture Classics, 2004).

fully demystified for Bassanio and Gratiano, Portia revealing herself as Balthasar, each of them gleefully plays on the cuckoldry trope that Portia and Nerissa had already introduced: "Sweet doctor, you shall be my bedfellow," Bassanio declares; "When I am absent, then lie with my wife!" (ll. 284-85). In this there is, all at once, a homoerotic imaginary, a fantasy of being cuckolded, and a masturbatory imperative that is also, in a sense, an orgiastic union—"lie with my wife" is a directive to Portia to lie with her alter ego Balthasar who is also now the bedfellow of Bassanio, imaginatively binding all three in the solitary act of Portia lying alone in bed. Gratiano and Nerissa, meanwhile, have their own similarly queer exchange:

> GRATIANO: Were you the clerk that is to make me cuckold?
> NERISSA: Aye, but the clerk that never means to do it—
> Unless he live until he be a man.
> (ll. 282-83)

Adopting a new gendered identity, Nerissa promises that she will never cuckold Gratiano as an adolescent boy but may do so as a man. The second occasion on which Nerissa imagines some form of transition into male adulthood, this statement is another metatheatrical joke on the boy-actor playing Nerissa but is also, within the world of *Merchant* itself, a seemingly gratuitous homoeroticizing of her relationship with Gratiano. Why does Nerissa affirm that she "never means" to cuckold her husband "unless" she becomes somehow reembodied as a man? Her conditional "unless" evokes a queer futurity, indeed a future *made* queer by the "if" of transformative possibility; Nerissa's cross-gender identification destabilizes the seeming closure of the heterosexual bond and re-threatens the security expressed in Gratiano's relief that he has not actually been cuckolded after all.

In this scene of rings given, lost, found, and reinterpreted, queer potential is the end-product of a long arc of financial entanglement which, though at once enabling and disruptive and thus hermeneutically confusing, is the only way through which affective bonds are legible in Venice.

As Morocco had noticed, desire remains illegible in this world except through risk-taking, "hazard" for "fair advantages." Portia's genius is to reconfigure herself into triadic union with Antonio and Bassanio by, in act 5, first making him vulnerable to her and then by handing Antonio the ring to give to Bassanio as "his surety": "Here, Lord Bassanio, swear to keep this ring," Antonio says, virtually replicating the moment when Bassanio wed Portia with the same ring, thereby fully confirming their tripartite marriage (5.1.254-56). By sanctioning this image of their marriage with her own wedding ring and shortly thereafter announcing Antonio's financial restitution, Portia finally closes the gap that had left her outside their affinitive pairing. The play ends with Gratiano's ribald promise to "keep[] safe Nerissa's ring" (5.1.307), pairing them off and leaving the other three to their own resolution.

I have offered, then, that both *Shrew* and *Merchant* articulate a queer mercantilism where financial motive destabilizes kinship networks, renders heterosexual desire mystified and sometimes illegible, and reveals or even produces queer possibility through the repatterning of normative strategies of courtship and marriage. Over the last few decades, performance and queer theory have ably shown how gender and amatory relations are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through the often disarticulated play of desire, but have sometimes been less wary of the economic-material conditions that facilitate, delimit, and open up nonnormative forms of desirous play. Shakespeare's Italian comedies gesture to a nascent moment in the transition to capitalism when marriage, though still very much within the ideological capture of the state and its models of hierarchical power, was also coming under the more unruly and unpredictable helm of economic expansion, with all its risks and uncertainties. The most canny actors on these marriage markets are the ones most willing to engage a risky futurity, queering more traditional amatory models for the sake both of financial profit and of new relational models of desire.

CHAPTER 4

Risky Business: Rereading Ben Jonson

"When freed of ritual, religious, or juridical restraints, a money medium can imbue life itself with a pervasive and ongoing sense of risk, a recurrent anticipation of gain and loss that lends to all social intercourse a pointed, transactional quality."
—Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart*[1]

"The judges will decide
The likes of me abide
Spectators of the show
Always staying low
The game is on again."
—ABBA, "The Winner Takes It All"

I. TOWARD A BIOECONOMICS OF RISK

It is conventional for Jacobean city comedy to have its trickster figure identify himself as such at the beginning of the play, an act of demystification that reflects an epistemological disparity within the play but also produces this disparity in the playhouse. Those in the know, that is, include the playhouse audience, who watch the con-artist's victims, left in the dark, fall for a scam. For Rosalind Miles, Ben Jonson's *Volpone* "brilliantly exemplifies Jonson's unique jungle vision, with its self-contained world composed entirely of predators and prey," reflecting Jonson's "personal division of humanity into gullers and gulled."[2] Theodore Leinwand proposes that "gulling" is city comedy's "master structure," even if the genre "illustrates both how foolish and how dangerous gulling can be."[3] This character dichotomy, guller and gulled, lurks everywhere in critical

[1] Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 4.
[2] Rosalind Miles, *Ben Jonson: His Craft and Art* (Savage: Barnes & Noble Books, 1990), 105, 106.
[3] Theodore Leinwand, *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613* (Madison: The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 53.

reception of the genre, and any cursory reading of the plays—from William Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money* (1598) to Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* (1616)—shows why. Their affective purchase depends on the tensions produced by their actors' relationships to secrecy, to knowing and unknowing. We, the knowing audience, take pleasure in watching the scheme unfold yet wait with bated breath for things to go awry, for something to jam the epistemological trap. As William Slights argues, good city comedy successfully exploits "internal pressures in the society that force characters and plots to exhaust the resources of secrecy."[4] It becomes clear very quickly that the maintenance of façade is indeed its own exhausting, and even financially depleting, work: in *The Alchemist*, Face affirms "'Fore God" that "my intelligence / Costs me more money, than my share oft comes to[.]"[5] Later in the play, Subtle offers that a good con-artist

> will fetch 'em [his dupes],
> And make them haste towards their gulling more.
> A man must deal like a rough nurse, and fright
> Those that are froward, to an appetite.
> (2.5.87-90)

"Time and again" in the play, Leinwand observes, "hazard is discursively aligned with effort, strain, or labor," and "must be seen to entail toil."[6] If "foolish" and "dangerous," there is yet a kind of admiration that comes from watching the scammers at work. They may not labor in any traditional sense, but their financially-profitable wit was understood by early modern audiences as an increasingly necessary skill in the crowded and competitive cities of early capitalism.

These representational emphases on labor and secrecy lend a sensuous immediacy to the experience of the urban scam. My previous chapters have shown how versions of productive play,

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[4] William W. E. Slights, *Ben Jonson and the Art of Secrecy* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1994), 75.
[5] Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, in *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, ed. Robert M. Adams (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), act 1, scene 3, lines 107-9. Hereafter referred to by act, scene, and line number.
[6] Leinwand, *Theatre, Finance, and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 130.

rooted in the sensuousness of economic exchange, begin to make themselves felt in the cultural life that emerges from the upheavals of the transition to capitalism. This final chapter will suggest that, by the first decades of the seventeenth century, this cultural phenomenon had become entrenched and visible enough that it could be made the object of satire. The prevalence of scam in city comedy reflects a wider anxiety about urban crime and traces its literary parentage to the largely prose genre of rogue or cony-catching literature, which had been hugely popular in England at least since the 1567 publication of Thomas Harman's *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds*. This literature sensationalized the criminal underground and seems have derived its cultural cache from a voyeuristic desire to see how con-artists made work of play: as Jean-Christophe Agnew writes, "the effect of these fictions was to assimilate an otherwise erratic pattern of itineracy and trespass into a more familiar notion of deliberate, if dubious, guild activity: a freemasonry of crime whose arts and mysteries the pamphlets purported to lay bare."[7] Jonson's city comedy participates in this unveiling of otherwise dubious relations and does so with a relish that effects a curious kind of identification with the very behaviors it means to comically satirize. By turning to satire, then, I am not suggesting that Jonson was critical of relations that the previous authors were complicit in representing, but rather that city comedy makes explicit what was largely latent in the literature I have been examining.

In this chapter I am interested in developing what I call a bioeconomics of risk. I have already defined "bioeconomics" as a method of reading the body in its transactional life with other interested actors, bearing the brunt, so to speak, of its own gains and losses even in a period when transaction is being gradually shunted into a placeless market. It occurs to me that when we think about "scam" in the twenty-first century, what likely comes to mind is a bevy of technologically-

[7] Agnew, 65.

mediated activities, robocalls or hastily-written emails or sketchy online postings promising some form of reward for helping the faceless, sometimes nameless person on the other end. Many scams are, of course, more elaborate or sophisticated than this, but more often than not they mediate the act of exchange in some way by putting the scammer at considerable physical or geographical distance from their conned victim. In the early seventeenth century we are dealing with something very different: a much more up-close and personal act of deception that puts the scammer at significantly more risk than their twenty-first-century counterparts. Jonson's scammers must use their altered, disguised, or otherwise reshaped bodies to craft a fraudulent narrative that will help them secure the trust, and from there the coin, of a defrauded client. This is a limited but intimate form of interactivity whose success or failure hinges on the embodied performance of the scammer, rather than (as in merchant risk-taking) on the vicissitudes of external forces in the form of threats like shipwreck, piratical capture, long delay, or the like. Viewed as part of a bioeconomy of volatile relations, the embodied performance of the scammer is, however, more than a virtuoso act of theatricality, though it is certainly that. The comedies, rather, are interested in the ways the early capitalist city produces and shapes a more generalized and diffuse risky subjectivity that cuts across profession, class, and so on, since it emerges from the sensuous experience of *translucent* exchange with others (neither fully transparent nor fully opaque). As will be clear from reading *Volpone* alongside *The Alchemist*, the particular character of this risky subjectivity—its drives, its social and economic stakes—is shaped in very large part by these social differences. Nonetheless, these plays identify the penchant for risk-taking with a rather broad swath of social classes and economic professions; it is part of the affective life of the scammers as well as of those they con.

As a literary form, city comedy uses this sensuous mode of interactivity to awaken a particular affect, suspense, which had already been developed in revenge tragedy but was now

being shaped to comic, satirical ends. The "postallegorical" sensibility of Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd had brought to the theater a "new dramatic mode of representation [that] radically reduce[d] moments of predictability," and it is precisely this problematic of the (un)predictable that city comedy capitalizes on and in which it finds a certain entertainment purchase.[8] City comedy can thus be seen as a kind of metagenre whose staging of risky socioeconomic relations produces in its audience the same "Janus-faced" feeling that risk itself is constituted by, as Emily Nacol describes it; in risk there is both a "threat to security" and a rush of the "exhilarating or pleasurable."[9] For early modern audiences there was already a certain blurring of playhouse and gambling-house in a theater where bets were often placed on actors' performances, and where the new phenomenon of paying before rather than after seeing the show had "turned playgoing into something of a gamble," as Gina Bloom puts it.[10] Watching these risky relations play out onstage has a way of bringing the sensuousness of the experience of risk to the experience of the city comedy itself, putting us for example on the side of the scammers even as we also anticipate their eventual capture.

The familiar guller/gulled characterology can sometimes be reductive about these relations, categorizing them wholesale as relations of predation in which the more clever take advantage of the less clever. "Economic worriers like Jonson," we are told, "feared not so much a culture of alienation, as the opposite: they dreaded a society where people trust all too readily, and believe too easily."[11] While the question of epistemic competence is certainly at the center of how these

[8] Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster, S*hakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 45.
[9] Emily C. Nacol, *An Age of Risk: Politics and Economy in Early Modern Britain* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2016), 125, 7.
[10] Gina Bloom, *Gaming the Stage: Playable Media and the Rise of English Commercial Theater* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2018), 2.
[11] Brian Sheerin, *Desires of Credit in Early Modern Theory and Drama: Commerce, Poesy, and the Profitable Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2016), 112.

plays represent urban financial relations, their victims are often just as greedy and opportunistic as those who end up conning them, and the disparities between their eventual winners and losers should not obscure that what was unfolding all along was a kind of game—one in which all participants were more or less equally vulnerable to one another and to the arm of the law. The riskiness of the city comedy's relations means they are interested not simply in what happens when credulous people get tricked, but in how such trickery is enabled by the cultural conditions produced by an economy that is itself radically indeterminate, volatile, and "tricky." Indeed, city comedy's transacting parties often do not share the same basic epistemic assumptions about the nature and meaning of their exchange, and thus become partially opaque to one another and even to themselves. The oft-articulated anxiety about deceiving or cozening oneself drives this point home: these are not straightforward relations of greedy or extortionate predation of the gullible, but risky relational schemes that could collapse on themselves at any time.[12] In Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*, Gilthead warns his son that

> We citizens never trust, but we do cozen:
> For, if our debtors pay, we cozen them;
> And if they do not, then we cozen ourselves.
> But that's a hazard everyone must run
> That hopes to make his son a gentleman!
> (3.1.22-26)

The eventuality that credit will collapse is almost a truism for the city comedy, which seems unable to imagine any credit-relation without the omnipresent threat of bad belief. But the epistemic danger of cozening oneself is especially striking, evoking a monstrous and all-consuming financial

[12] To be sure, a "gull" in the 1590s could denote "a credulous person" or a "simpleton," but as a transitive verb it could mean anything from "to trick," "to give a false report," or "to jest" (think of the gulling of Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*), and by the end of the seventeenth century it had come to denote exactly the opposite: "a trickster, cheat, imposter" (*OED*, s.vv., "gull, *n*.," 1; "gull, *v*.," 2; "gull, *n.*," 3). The adjective "gullible" as a description of someone "easily cheated" or "befooled" would not develop until the nineteenth century, although earlier forms—"cull," "cully," and "cullible"—date back to the late-seventeenth century (see *OED*, s.v., "gullible, *adj*.").

system where the *ifs* of human behavior can threaten even the most carefully-laid plots. Even those who appear to have the upper hand are dogged by that "if," that reminder of the fundamental unpredictability of other people especially in economic life. As the usurer Pisaro puts it in Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money*, "Gold is sweet, and they deceive themselves" (line 26). The epistemic and financial disparities that the plays produce are a source of humor for an omniscient audience that sees these exchanges roundly, but they also expose the economy of manipulatable credit-relations as a kind of sick joke.

Just as biopolitics, broadly speaking, entails the formation and manipulation of the body (its life and its death) by state power, so too is bioeconomics interested in how the body is made legible not just to economic networks but also to the legal apparatuses against which the city comedy often positions economic gain. If the previous chapters were interested in different forms of mercantile risk, performed under the auspices of a state which participates in the cultural life of risky play by maintaining a vested interest in mercantile trade balances, in Jonson the satirist we are dealing with another context entirely, one in which risk-taking happens covertly and in antagonistic relationship to the state, the law, and other people. This is where the work on secrecy becomes relevant, since in these comedies the production of risk is a function of the inability to perform, as it were, "out in the open"; this is about performing an inauthentic persona for financial gain, risking the authentic personhood that remains under threat of state punishment and bodily violence precisely as a result of this inauthenticating performance. Where much work on biopolitics tends to differentiate the political from the economic, the city comedy understands these as joined in the body of the fraudulent performer and in the bodies of the fraud's victims, who appeal to or run from the law as the final arbiter of legitimate gain and loss. I have emphasized the natural body because the city comedy's relations belong to a kind of pre-history of speculative

capital in which the relations that would later develop into fully-fledged instruments of risky financial capitalism are still nascent and still largely structured on individuated acts of personal exchange. A century later, the South Sea Bubble—a massive financial collapse produced by a heady mix of corporate fraud and a frenzy of investment that led to colossal inflation—would reflect the development of the largely impersonal, organizational, corporate life of risk. Here, however, we are dealing with something much more intimate, subjective, and thus more available to a history of the affective life of risky capital.

Indeed, it is the everpresent threat of legal punishment—the risk of getting caught, of being identified as a fraud—that energizes the comedy and shapes the character of its social relations. And yet Jacobean law was still in the process of codifying the adjudication of fraud and similar financial crimes, opening up space for the scammer to *play* through the gaps in the law's reach. I am interested in why, for example, *Volpone* ends with the Venetian Avocatori meting out punishments to the titular fox and his equally predatory dupes, while at the end of *The Alchemist* officers arrive to restore order but prove totally ineffective. The contrast is all the more striking given that, in *Volpone*, there is not much chatter about law and punishment until their representatives arrive, whereas in *The Alchemist* the threat of being overheard and exposed is indexed from the very opening scene: "Will you have the neighbors hear you? will you betray all?" (1.1.7). I turn to legal risk not as a departure from economic risk but in order to show how both kinds of risk meet in the spaces of the early capitalist city. Further, city comedy reflects a peculiar cultural moment when the emergence of a recognizably modern form of risk—hazard mitigated by contract—coincides with significant changes to the legal understanding of contract itself, a phenomenon I will explore in more detail in my reading of *The Alchemist*. Though it is always the nominal arbitrator of these risky relations, the law itself proves to be corrupt, absent, incompetent,

or (most interesting for my purposes here) trickable in ways that come far from settling the epistemological questions about belief, deception, guilt, and blame that remain at the center of these comedies' representations of socioeconomic relations.

Since the publication of Brian Gibbons's influential *Jacobean City Comedy* (1968), critics have been attentive to the ways in which the genre adapts the popular morality-play theme of avarice to the socioeconomic conditions of early capitalism.[13] But risk, specifically, has only recently and sporadically been associated with Jonson's dramatic corpus. For David Baker, Jonson's masque *Entertainment at Britain's Burse* (1609) is "an exercise in dramatic risk management," one that "reaches down to the epistemic and psychic substrate of an 'essentially precarious economic system.'"[14] Anne-Julia Zwierlein observes that *Eastward Ho!* (1605), Jonson's collaboration with George Chapman and John Marston, "presents the entire gamut of early modern economic possibilities on stage," observing that city comedies "dynamically create—and question" the social types they put on view, "linking them with specific life narratives but then twisting them in other directions."[15] Changes in economic winds make rogues out of merchants, or send middling shopkeepers on romantic adventures. The theatrical market Jonson wrote for had become accustomed to original plots, reworkings of familiar plots, mixed genres and media, and, above all, to the experience of theater as a zone of unpredictable outcome. The early English theater was an important site in a culture of pervasive risk, whose attendant affects, vulnerability and exhilaration, were roused by though no longer identified exclusively with

[13] See Brian Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy: A Study of Satiric Plays by Jonson, Marston, and Middleton* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968).
[14] David J. Baker, *On Demand: Writing for the Market in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010), 100-1. Baker quotes "essentially precarious economic system" from Peter Musgrave, "The Economics of Uncertainty: The Structural Revolution in the Spice Trade, 1480-1640," in *Shipping, Trade, Commerce: Essays in Memory of Ralph Davis*, ed. D. H. Aldcroft and P. L. Cottrell (Leicester: Univ. of Leicester Press, 1981), 10.
[15] Anne-Julia Zwierlein, "Shipwrecks in the City: Commercial Risk as Romance in Early Modern City Comedy," in *Plotting Early Modern London: New Essays on Jacobean City Comedy*, ed. Dieter Mehl, Angela Stock, and Zwierlein (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 76, 78-79.

mercantile activity. *The Alchemist*, in particular, is always using the language of long-distance mercantile trade even though it plays out entirely in the cramped space of a single house. As one critic noted of the play long ago, it is the scammers' "absurd pretension to legality and high finance," the inflation of their scam as a "venture tripartite," an "indenture tripartite," and a "common cause," that "provides some of the humor and meaning of the play."[16] Even as it deliciously analogizes the risk taken on by merchant venturers with the risks of urban con-artistry, the play depends in those same moments on the disavowal of the comparison in order to achieve its comic meaning. The Jonsonian city comedy thus reflects the social life of early speculative capital, where the impulse to be *seen* investing in profitable ventures is in many ways the object of satire. Everyone thinks they are a merchant, an entrepreneur, an investor, or at least closely connected to one; everyone is involved in some get-rich-quick scheme or other. And yet, as the comedies' relations of exploitation, trickery, and fraud make clear, both gull and con really are risking their economic livelihoods in ways that are not dissimilar to the risks demanded by mercantile venture, so that the apparent absurdity turns out not to be so absurd after all.

We laugh at the pretension because late capitalism has conditioned us to associate risk only with very large financial gains and losses, with the kinds of calculated gambles made by merchant traders and, later, by stockbrokers. In *The Alchemist*, by contrast, Face begins his conning of Dapper by asking for twenty nobles, a couple hundred U.S. dollars by today's reckoning; and as the company of rogues sums up its earnings late in act 5, among its inventory are "fishwives' rings" and "alewives' single money" (5.5.114). And yet, despite its usual associations with long-distance commercial contract, risk surfaces in the city comedy as a critical feature of the London domestic economy. Indeed, though the word "risk" does not actually appear in English until 1661,

[16] Edward B. Partridge, *The Broken Compass* [1958], reprinted in *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, 446. The quoted material derives from 1.1.135, 5.5.131, and 4.3.76, respectively.

the tension between cultivating and neutralizing risk "lies at the very heart of what we now call 'capitalism,'" as David Graeber argues.[17] Further, the development of various forms of aleatory contract (from Latin *alea*, "a throw of the dice") in late-sixteenth-century Europe, responding to new navigational and commercial conditions, reflects a shift in the ways people understood time and oriented themselves toward an unknown future. The more fatalistic understanding of Fortuna inherited from the classical and medieval worlds was being reshaped by the demands of mercantilism: the ability to embrace chance, and to make provision against its pitfalls, was increasingly a vital economic skill.[18] At this time, "hazard" is the term that roughly translates to what would later become risk, as in *The Merchant of Venice*'s casket game which urges its participant to "give and hazard all he hath." I am thinking of risk therefore not only in terms of any of various professions that demand risk-taking, but as a more diffuse set of skills that assume an orientation toward a profitable future, regardless of how large the payoff ends up being. But if previous chapters were interested in the canny ability to predict the behavior of others and to strategize accordingly, Jonson's city comedies turn this business of prediction into a farce, as indexed by their continual return to the threat of *self*-deception. The risky undercurrent of city life threatens the downfall not just of the gullible, but also of those who are doing the gulling.

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[17] David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011), 319.

[18] For more on this ideological shift, see Joan Ozark Holmer, *The Merchant of Venice: Choice, Hazard, and Consequence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998); Giovanni Ceccarelli, "Risky Business: Theological and Canonical Thought on Insurance from the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.3 (2001): 607-58; Ian MacInnes, "'Ill Luck, Ill Luck?': Risk and Hazard in *The Merchant of Venice*," in *Global Traffic: Discourses and Practices of Trade in English Literature and Culture from 1550 to 1700*, ed. Barbara Sebek and Stephen Deng (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 39-55; Karin Zachmann, "Risk in Historical Perspective: Concepts, Contexts, and Conjunctions," in *Risk: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, ed. Claudia Klüppelberg, Daniel Straub, and Isabell M. Welpe (New York: Springer, 2014), 3-35; and Nacol. While these sometimes overstate the secularity thesis, giving the impression of a sudden rupture—when in reality the emerging strategies for managing the unknown were often syncretized with religious faith—the trend toward facing rather than turning away from the whims of chance is nonetheless a striking feature of emerging early modern experiences of time.

I begin with a reading of *Volpone* (1606), where the law eventually succeeds in capturing and punishing both the scammers and their only slightly less guilty victims. I then embark on a more sustained reading of *The Alchemist* (1610), where the law proves quite a bit less efficacious even though its presence is felt much more insistently throughout the play. In a (relatively) brief conclusion, I consider Jonson's epigram "To a weak Gamester in Poetry" alongside the work of the sixteenth-century Italian polymath Girolamo Cardano, whose treatise on gambling paved the way for modern probability theory. Cardano's rich descriptions of card-game rivalries articulate ways of confronting the problem of the fraudulent competitor that resonate with Jonson's interest in the emergent relations of risk in the capitalist city. These are cultures of dis-credit, where a mix of guardedness and aspiration produce vexed relations characterized not just by predatory exploitation, but also by a kind of risky fantasy.[19]

II. *VOLPONE* AND THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF SCHEMING

If, as I've already recounted, the maintenance of secrecy in the city comedy demands a level of attentive care that turns it into a species of work, it is perhaps odd that we find Volpone boasting to his parasite Mosca about how little work he does to shyster his dupes and earn his income in the opening scene of that play:

> I glory
> More in the cunning purchase of my wealth
> Than in the glad possession, since I gain
> No common way; I use no trade, no venture;
> I wound no earth with plough-shares, fat no beasts
> To feed the shambles; have no mills for iron,
> Oil, corn, or men, to grind them into powder;
> I blow no subtle glass, expose no ships

[19] For the importance of credit-relations in an economy where there was a dearth of physical coinage in circulation, see Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

To threat'nings of the furrow-facèd sea;
I turn no moneys in the public bank,
Nor usure private.[20]

And yet he is fabulously wealthy. Abjuring industry, agricultural labor, guild craftsmanship, maritime venturing, banking, and moneylending, Volpone seems to have figured out what Marlowe's Barabas could not: how to rake in an income without the toil, sweat, and calloused fingertips that leave the accounting Barabas envious of Arabian gold. This, for Volpone, is a point of pride, his "cunning purchase" more valuable to him than the possession of gold itself. If Barabas "smiles to see how full his bags are crammed," Volpone appears to care less about how much gold is in his coffers (though he cares about that a great deal) and more about his own virtuosity in obtaining it.

Yet Volpone does not so much abjure labor entirely as transfigure it along distinctly capitalistic lines. He worships his gold, as his opening panegyric to it makes clear ("Open the shrine, that I may see my saint" [1.1.2]). But gold, he declares later in the same speech, is nothing in itself; it is "the dumb god, that givest all men tongues, / That canst do naught, and yet mak'st men do all things" (1.1.22-23). This is an early articulation of the idea that money, whatever its intrinsic value, has the unique ability to command others' labor-power. It had been widely recognized since Aristotle that gold and silver have no inherent value, that their usefulness as media of exchange depends entirely on agreement and convention (or, in Aristotle's terminology, on *symbolon*).[21] Volpone begins with this premise but takes it in a decidedly capitalistic direction: his gold is not simply an object of exchange through the mutual consent of transactors, but a mysterious "god" that compels action and activates latent potential in others despite its own

[20] Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, in *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, act 1, scene 1, lines 30-40. Hereafter cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.
[21] See Graeber, 298-99.

impotence. He anticipates Karl Marx's reflections on the abilifying power of money in "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," ideas which Marx develops from a reading not of Jonson but of Jonson's contemporary, Shakespeare:

> [Money] is the visible divinity—the transformation of all human and natural properties into their contraries….[T]he divine power of money lies in its character as men's estranged, alienating, and self-disposing species-nature. Money is the alienated ability of mankind.
>
> That which I am unable to do as a man, and of which therefore all my individual essential powers are incapable, I am able to do by means of money. Money thus turns each of these powers into something which in itself it is not—turns it, that is, into its contrary.[22]

In this passage from the early Marx we encounter a somewhat uncharacteristic turn to the sensuousness of the experience of money—which "translates [wishes] from their mediated, imagined, or willed existence into their sensuous, actual existence"—a phenomenon which Marx, like Volpone, likens to the experience of "visible divinity."[23] It has been argued that Volpone's "money fetishism" mistakes a "human, arbitrary mode of significance" for real or intrinsic value (a form of idolatry), but it seems rather that Volpone has adopted something closer to the Judaic-Christian critique of the idol as inert matter, impotent rather than omnipotent, meaningful only insofar as others choose to worship it.[24] In the transactor's handling of the medium of transaction, Volpone charts the genesis of something new, an anonymous force that compels action. For while, semantically, his verbs belong to the dumb god ("givest," "mak'st"), this power to *do* is also explicitly denied the god ("canst do naught"). Instead there is something demiurgic in the relation, a power that inheres in neither the gold itself nor in the one who possesses it, but in the joining of

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[22] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 104. Marx reaches this conclusion after quoting a passage from *Timon of Athens* in which "Shakespeare excellently depicts the real nature of money" (103).

[23] Marx, 104.

[24] David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 24.

the two. This phenomenon would seemingly apply to any economic formation that depends on the circulation of money, but, with labor brought into the equation, it begins to take on a distinctly capitalistic hue. The paradoxical power Volpone imagines in this speech-giving dumb god, expanded into its broader socioeconomic register, is the power of the capitalist relation itself, which directs the greatest share of profits to the one who can harness and instrumentalize the labor-power of everyone else—whose *doing* is in making others do. Hence Volpone's recognition that he "use[s] no trade"; it is his gold, as he understands it, that does all the work for him.

His work, rather, is play: quite literally, to play dead. Believing he is on his deathbed and that they stand some chance of inheriting his great wealth, the legacy-hunters of Venice, each named after a different bird of prey, come flocking to Volpone's home to offer him gifts (bribes) in exchange for being named in his will. Volpone is eager to receive these, but he is equally eager to "play[] with their hopes, / And…coin them into profit, / And look upon their kindness, and take more" (1.1.85-87). He appears to derive as much pleasure from tricking them as from receiving the valuable "plate, coin, [and] jewels" they bring to his bedside (l. 78). This penchant for play extends even beyond the deathbed trick as Volpone, hearing of the beauty of Corvino's wife Celia, impersonates the famous mountebank Scoto of Mantua and holds forth at length in the piazza outside Corvino's home, hoping to catch a glimpse of Celia at her window where her jealous husband has confined her.[25] The lengths to which Volpone goes merely to see what Celia looks like, when, as Mosca had put it, all he needed was "some disguise" (1.5.128), suggests a theatrical impulse that exceeds and transcends the use to which it is actually put; it expends itself far beyond what is necessary. Mountebanks—entertainers who sold medicines in Italy's (and particularly

[25] As Adams notes, "Scoto of Mantua was a real person, a juggler, magician, and performer at legerdemain; he actually visited England and performed before Queen Elizabeth, about a quarter of a century before *Volpone* had its first performance" (27n4).

Venice's) piazzas and peddled various "trifles," as Thomas Coryat calls them in his noted description—were already theatrical figures, but Volpone of course is not really a mountebank; he is a performer pretending to be another, more culturally legible kind of performer (and not just a "kind," but an actual celebrity in the profession).[26] His performativity is thus analogized by, though not to be conflated with, that of the Venetian mountebank. It seems to tap from a deep cultural well of economic play, here in the form of performance for profit, that *Volpone* identifies both with the open marketplace and with the legal-economic structures of inheritance in Venice. Both the deathbed trick and the impersonation of Scoto require a high ludism in excess of the gains they actually produce, meaning their theatricality is at once a mechanism of economic gain and, it seems, a source of pleasure beyond the "merely" economic. (In the one case, this source of pleasure is the misanthropic impulse to "play[] with [the] hopes" of greedy legacy-hunters; in the other, about erotic interest in the wife of one of the men Volpone is gulling.) Both cases reveal something about the affective life of capitalist relations: not just that they are shaped by avarice or ambition or by an aggressive will to dominate and exploit, but that these dark drives are given shape in the ostensible levity of play.

Part of what I am pointing to is a certain feedback loop, or a discursive interplay, between material economy and cultural performance. As Marx argues, a money economy alienates people from their own ability by relocating this ability in the money-medium, which acts not only as a socially-acceptable medium of exchange but also as the instrument of personal power. As someone with an excess of accumulated wealth, Volpone's ability, his personal power, thus seems to encounter few limits. Knowing that his money commands others' attention, and that this power

[26] See Thomas Coryat, *Coryat's Crudities: Hastily Gobbled Up in Five Months of Travels* (London, 1611), 271-75. As M.A. Katritzky puts it, "The defining characteristic of the genuine mountebank is the marketing of medicine through some kind of entertainment element targeted at a live audience" ("Marketing Medicine: The Image of the Early Modern Mountebank," *Renaissance Studies* 15.2 [2001]: 124).

circuitously absolves him of the need to labor, Volpone can spin material excess into the freedom to play. That he is able to perform certain cultural scripts convincingly—*man on his deathbed*, or *confident mountebank*—not only proves his own actorly virtuosity, and not only exposes a certain theatricalism deeply embedded in Venetian cultural life, but also gestures toward the tensive conceptual exchange between work and play that I have been identifying with mercantile economy. It is the fact that he can enlist these cultural scripts for both profit and play that makes him a distinctly capitalistic figure. Volpone's play is performing the kind of work that we've seen in, for example, Marlowe's Barabas, except that Volpone is not the mistreated and marginalized figure Barabas was, and thus his impulse to play or toy with others is conscripted to a different set of drives. He is bent not on revenge, but on mastery—on showing that he can outwit everyone else in a game that he has manufactured, but which nonetheless comes attached to real financial stakes as well as to the potential depredations of the law. The entire plot is a seemingly meaningless gamble to enrich an already wealthy man, and thus can't be understood as motivated by economic gain alone. Volpone, rather, aggressively seeks the undoing of men whose avaricious "hope" he has himself procured. The question is: why?

Another way of putting this is that the seeming gratuitousness of the whole scheme actually gestures to a tangle of half-visible drives and affects teeming beneath the surface. Is Volpone's primary motivation to outwit and humiliate the men who come seeking his inheritance, making the play "a study of man's wolfish compulsion to make others suffer"?[27] Is it to prove to Mosca, who plays a curious role as both accomplice and audience, that he is a convincing actor—perhaps out of sexual desire for Mosca, whom Volpone, impressed by Mosca's own virtuosity, wishes he could "transform…to a Venus" (5.3.104)? Is it to prove, as his opening speech declares, that he

[27] James D. Redwine, Jr., "Volpone's 'Sport' and the Structure of Jonson's *Volpone*," *SEL* 34.2 (1994): 301.

can enrich himself without labor or drudgery, a feat that would strike most as too good to be true? All seem, and likely are, plausible. The point is not so much to land on an identifiable motive as it is to interrogate the conditioning of a certain kind of capitalist subject. As Maggie Vinter puts it, "*Volpone* is less concerned with rejecting morally dubious mimetic deception than with exploring the nature of a selfhood that understands itself through its ability to deceive mimetically."[28] Such opacity seems to characterize every social relation in Venice, suggested in the question Peregrine asks himself in the first few moments of meeting Sir Politic Would-be: "This fellow, / Does he gull me, trow? or is gulled?" (2.1.24). If some form of fraudulence is assumed to lurk behind every social encounter, the trick, as Volpone knows, is to hide in plain sight; the most successful fraud is the one that doesn't seem to carry the possibility of fraudulence in the first place. If urban life is already a game of Machiavellian opportunism, Volpone shows that one way to win the game is, ironically, to appear not to be playing the game at all.

We've seen much of this, abundantly, in Marlowe and in Shakespeare. In the latter, this penchant for play often takes the form of wager and the embracing of risk, under the auspices of a state that has a vested interest in weighing mercantile trade balances in its favor and which thus participates in the cultural life of risky play. In Jonson the satirist, we are dealing with another context entirely: the criminal underground of scam, where risk happens covertly and in antagonistic relationship to the state and the law. Volpone seemingly abjures risk in his brag that he "expose[s] no ships / To threat'nings of the furrow-facèd sea," but the risk he abjures here is mercantile risk, tied to a specific kind of work, not risk *tout court*. The more localized, sensuous, embodied risk he takes on is the risk that his fraudulent play will be exposed to a hostile lawcourt

[28] Maggie Vinter, *Last Acts: The Art of Dying on the Early Modern Stage* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2019), 121.

if he miscarries any aspect of the performance.[29] In contrast to, for example, Shakespeare's Antonio, Volpone is not threatened by external calamity. His risk-taking, rather, lies in the possible exposure of his authentic self, in the sociolegal rather than ontological sense. These two forms of risk do overlap, partly suggested in Jonson's selection of the mercantile hub of Venice as the location for Volpone's risky con-game. Corvino, convinced by Mosca to pimp out his wife Celia in order to secure his place in Volpone's will, is a merchant. This is more than incidental; it reflects the erotic undercurrent of risky play that courses through the social relations of the mercantile city. Volpone wagers that Corvino will risk his reputation this way because he is accustomed to the demands of risk-for-profit that his merchant business has cultivated and refined. The same sensibility for risk, that is, surely also motivates Corvino's domestic business, as it motivates Volpone's own. By exposing himself both to social censure and to the law, Volpone risks his sociolegal personhood for the promise of mastery over social relations. It's a dangerous game to play in part because it didn't really need to be played at all—but that, for Volpone, seems to be its thrill.

And yet the play as a whole doesn't actually awaken our spectatorly feeling of risk until very late, when the scam finally begins to unravel. Until this point, Volpone and Mosca had been such dexterous performers that we had almost forgotten something could go wrong. When the law, in the form of the Venetian Avocatori, finally appears in act 4, it is not even because Volpone's scam has been exposed, but because he has attempted to rape Celia. However, an ingenious plot by Mosca, who cuts a deal with Voltore to bear false witness, along with another performance of

[29] English law associated mountebanks with witches and conjurers and categorized their activities as felonies, seemingly on the assumption that all of these figures made financial profit fraudulently. See Edward Coke's *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England: Concerning High Treason, and Other Pleas of the Crown, and Criminall Causes* (London: Printed by M. Flesher, 1644), Cap. VI ("Of Felony by Conjuration, VVitchcraft, Sorcery, or Inchantment").

illness by Volpone who is sent for and carried into court, ends in Volpone's exoneration, and Mosca marvels at their ability even "to gull the court" (5.2.16). Through its first four acts, then, *Volpone* is less invested in representing the affective life of risk and more interested in figuring a bioeconomics, or a form of participation in social, relational life that foregrounds the body as the sensuous site of gain and loss. Volpone's moribund body acts as ocular guarantee for the legacy-hunters that their payout is near, just as it also serves as proof to the Avocatori that he could not have violated Celia. Successfully eliciting and shaping belief this way, Volpone is securing his own gain in a way that never feels particularly risky, because his theatrical virtuosity appears so invincible.

The eventual unravelling of his scam in act 5, however, retroactively reveals this form of play to have been incredibly risky. Volpone's body, contorted into the appearance of illness for his own profit, was actually subject all along to discovery and thence to corporal punishment. He uses his body both for profit and for play, making it legible in a particular way to a complex network of socioeconomic relations. The undoing of his embodied play will, however, come from the intrusion of a legal sphere that has otherwise remained an absent presence for most of the play. While Volpone and Mosca outwit the court in act 4, a second hearing at the Scrutineo in act 5 results in the severe punishment of both, and in the banishment or public humiliation of the legacy-hunters who committed their own ignominious infractions for Volpone's inheritance. Volpone's wealth, though gotten through "imposture" (l. 121), will (in a touch of irony) be donated to the Hospital of the Incurables, and for "feigning lame, gout, palsy, and such diseases," Volpone himself will "lie in prison, cramped with irons, / Till [he be] sick and lame indeed" (ll. 122-24). The punishment underscores the severity with which the Venetian law handles cases of imposture. Volpone's wistful response to his sentencing—"This is called mortifying of a fox"—has the force

both of a legal pronouncement and of the moral in, for example, an Aesopian beast fable; it deindividuates Volpone, rendering him into a category, removing his body and his individuated self from the sphere of social relations in which it had hitherto participated. The Avocatori have ordered not only the mortification of Volpone's body in prison, but also, it seems, the mortification of his total self, of his fox-ness, and thus of play. The state here is exercising its biopolitical power, reducing the fraudulent malingerer to a state of "bare life" that can succumb to disease and die in fact. It also seizes control of Volpone's fraudulently-obtained wealth and redirects it to a hospital for the terminally ill.

Though done in the most sober way, the state's turn to irony feels like an attempt to beat Volpone at his own game, to transfigure his criminal play into a juridical play that reinforces state power. In *Volpone*, law thus emerges as the only entity that can intervene into the field of risk—of unpredictable and often opaque socioeconomic relations—to rectify its abuses, asserting total authority over the body made vulnerable by risk. In effect, it eliminates risk altogether by effecting a fitting correspondence between punishment and crime: Mosca is condemned to galley-slavery for impersonating a gentleman; Voltore is banished from the fellowship of lawyers for providing false witness; and Corvino, who let himself be cuckolded for financial gain, is rowed through the Grand Canal in ass's ears. There is a kind of humor, but also a sense of total control, in the court's handling of these otherwise unruly criminal relations.

The chain of events that results in the discovery of Volpone's plot is too long to rehearse here, but it is important that Volpone understands himself to have engendered it through his own overreaching: "To make a snare for mine own neck!" he laments, "and run / My head into it, willfully! with laughter!….Out of mere wantonness!" (5.11.1-4). Like Barabas, who cooks alive in the cauldron he had prepared for his political rivals, Volpone is undone by his own vicious

behavior. This is a common enough theme in the morality play tradition, but it finds new expression in someone who, unlike Barabas, has not been trying to make any social, political, or even economic "point," so to speak. Volpone's excessive play finally reaches its limit not because he made a strategic miscalculation, but because its very excess, having no definite end or satisfaction, was always doomed to collapse on itself. In the ensuing confusion, Mosca had made his own play for Volpone's estate, which Volpone discovers after running into his dwarf, eunuch, and hermaphrodite who were "bid" by "Master Mosca" to "go play" outside, while he "took the keys" (ll. 10-11). This image of the innocent, recreational play of Volpone's *zanni* serves to set off the more calculating, opportunistic, avaricious play of Mosca, which itself ought to be differentiated from Volpone's "mere wantonness." Mosca, the parasite, actually wants the money; Volpone, the Venetian *magnifico*, wants to tantalize others with his money. Not all imposture, then, is alike; in Jonson's satirical picture, the feedback loop between material economy and cultural performance takes on a different shape in different actors, showing how play is conditioned by class and status. I mean this not just in the sense that aristocrats will seek out these pastimes, burghers those, and peasants those, but in the sense that the very impulse toward playful self-actualization is shaped and conditioned by different drives. Marx, indeed, calls money "the truly creative power"—it is the degree of access to it that determines the form a person's creativity might take.[30]

In his dedicatory epistle to *Volpone*, Jonson characteristically explains the entrance of the law in terms of neoclassical taste, with a sidelong glance at contemporary debates about theatrical representation: "Though my catastrophe may in the strict rigor of comic law meet with censure…it was done of industry….[M]y special aim being to put the snaffle in their mouths that cry out: We

[30] Marx, 104.

never punish vice in our interludes, &c."[31] This seeming capitulation will, however, be tested in his later play *The Alchemist*, which consistently indexes the threat of law and punishment but never actually brings the arm of the law against its comic frauds. In fact, in this later play, it is precisely the gaps in the law that shape the forms that criminal risk-taking is able to assume. If *Volpone*'s satire of capitalist greed is interested in spotlighting the aggressive play of the already-wealthy, *The Alchemist* develops a more sustained schematic of risky bioeconomics from a very different class vantage.

III. WHOSE LAW IS IT, ANYWAY?

The Alchemist opens with a heated argument: Subtle, pretending to be a learned magus or alchemist, and Face, a butler (really named Jeremy) who pretends to be his business partner, are quarreling about who rescued whom from poverty. With their confidante, a prostitute named Dol Common, they are operating an elaborate scam out of the house of Face's master, Lovewit, who has retired to the countryside to escape an outbreak of plague. In the course of their argument, Subtle reminds Face that he gave him "rules to cheat at horse-race, cock-pit, cards, / Dice, or whatever gallant tincture else," inducting him into the criminal underworld that is at least putting a roof over their heads (1.1.75-76). Later, one of their gulled clients, the quixotic knight Epicure Mammon, claims protection from these very tricks with the help of the philosopher's stone: "You shall no more deal with the hollow dice / Or the frail card," he assures his much savvier companion, the gamester Surly, who struggles unsuccessfully to help him see he is being conned (2.1.9-10). Both Subtle and Mammon view games as microcosms of the battle between Fortune and reason; and trickery, though antithetical to the ethos of the game, shares a certain affinity with the latter.

[31] Quoted in Redwine, Jr., 303.

Cheating, as Subtle in particular suggests, is a way to ensure that Fortune doesn't get her way. For Epicure Mammon, the quasi-magical, quasi-chemical power of the philosopher's stone will accomplish much the same thing: the exposure of the fraudulence of others, the final containment of the hazardous unpredictability of social relations. This desire to free themselves from the vicissitudes of the chancy and unpredictable suggests that both men, though of quite different station, share the perception that their social lives are unsettlingly volatile.

Such volatility is especially pronounced in the play's opening scene, where the social and legal precarity of Face, Subtle, and Dol is indexed by the number of times Dol has to shush her confederates, or they have to shush each other, during their argument: "Will you have the neighbors hear you?" (1.1.7); "Speak lower, rogue" (l. 14); "You might talk softlier, rascal" (l. 59); "Do you know who hears you?" (l. 86). The "acoustic proxemics" engendered by the play's cramped spaces threaten the sharing of knowledge that ought to remain guarded.[32] And indeed, the scammers are very nearly undone in act 5 when the neighbors appear in droves upon Lovewit's unexpectedly early return home, warning him that, while Jeremy the butler has not been seen "[t]hese six weeks at least," they have "heard a doleful cry" coming from the house (5.1.29-33). (This cry came from Dapper, another duped client, whom the scammers had gagged with gingerbread and locked in another room to keep him quiet; eventually, to their undoing, the gag melted in his mouth.) Order breaks down as witnesses continue to share reports and the gulls arrive to claim what Doctor Subtle had promised them, as a by now totally mystified Lovewit declares that "The world's turned Bedlam" (5.3.53). Face, like Volpone, eventually fesses up, but he has a final trick up his sleeve: he will offer the rich widow, Dame Pliant, to Lovewit in a shaky attempt to appease him. The ploy works, but in the babble of accusatory neighbors, enraged clients, and

[32] Christopher D. Foley, "'Breathe Less, and Farther Off': The Hazardous Proximity of Other Bodies in Jonson's *The Alchemist*," *Studies in Philology* 115.3 (2018): 514.

unravelling schemes, the "venture tripartite" between Subtle, Face, and Dol finally collapses. Subtle and Dol conspire to rid themselves of Face, who nonetheless detects their plot and dangles his pardon by Lovewit before them, warning of approaching officers and sending them fleeing over the back wall.

What's notable here is that, when the menace of law which hangs like a specter over the play finally materializes in the form of a band of officers, it proves totally inefficacious. The threat of their arrival is enough to rid Face of his partners who betrayed him, but once the officers appear onstage they do nothing to further the plot or enact justice. Rather, the necessary tidying-up is handled by the concerned parties themselves. As Subtle and Dol conspire against Face, Subtle affirms that "[t]o deceive him / Is no deceit, but justice, that would break / Such an inextricable tie as ours was" (5.5.102-4). Trickery or cozening is treated as its own kind of legal redress for a broken contract, performing roughly the same function as revenge had in the drama of the previous decade. And when Mammon arrives to claim the goods Subtle had promised him, Lovewit, though invoking the law, arbitrates the matter himself: "Sir, I can take no knowledge that they are yours, but by public means," he tells Mammon. "If you can bring certificate that you were gulled of 'em, / Or any formal writ out of a court, / That you did cozen yourself, I will not hold them" (5.5.67-70). Lovewit here composes his own kind of verbal contract with Mammon, in the background of which lurks the doctrine of consideration—a legal construct from English common law whose guiding principle is that contracts be made on the basis of reciprocity. Both parties must be able to offer guarantee, or "consideration," of their intent to fulfill their end of a bargain, which requires that both understand the terms of the contract they are entering. In the late-eighteenth century, as Warren Swain outlines, there would be a number of court cases debating what counted as consideration (or whether it was necessary at all), from *Pillans v Van Mierop* (1765) to *Rann v*

Hughes (1778) and *Hawkes v Saunders* (1782). In a broad sense, these debates were an effect of the rise of assumpsit, which "brought about a shift in focus away from underlying transaction, which was important in debt, and onto promises."[33] Where monetary payment had previously guaranteed the contract in a tangible, material way, the question of "promise" raised the possibility that consideration could be deferred into a not-yet realized future, and could even be, as Lord Mansfield would argue, immaterial; the moral imperative to fulfill one's end of a bargain could be counted as consideration.[34]

Lovewit seems to anticipate the epistemological sticking-points that attach to the legal question of promise and doesn't ask Mammon for the original contract—since, as he suggests, this was never actually written but rather made on credit, and can only be known to him "by public means" (and in the babble of reports from neighbors, Jeremy/Face, and a roster of angry clients showing up at his house, "public means" doesn't do him much good). Rather, he wants the court's determination that Mammon was the victim of gulling, which will serve as Mammon's own consideration in exchange for the return of his goods currently kept on Lovewit's property. It's a sly move on Lovewit's part, since the courts, given the dearth of written contracts of the kind that would have pertained to Mammon's transactions with Subtle, had a difficult time adjudicating cases of fraud in the early seventeenth century. As J. H. Baker notes, "[b]y the sixteenth century it was usual to allege deceit in all *assumpsit* actions, even when there was no deceit in fact," largely to "dispose of the technical objections" between nonfeasance (nonperformance of a covenant) and misfeasance (fraud or deceit) that hampered fifteenth-century contract law.[35] Roughly after 1530,

[33] Warren Swain, "The Changing Nature of the Doctrine of Consideration, 1750-1850," *The Journal of Legal History* 26.1 (2005): 55. Lord Mansfield famously ruled in *Pillans v Van Mierop* that consideration was not necessary where a written agreement had been drafted, a decision that was overturned thirteen years later by *Rann v Hughes*.
[34] I outline the early modern legal history of consideration, debt, and contract rather sketchily here and below; future iterations of this argument will need to extend the analysis to provide a more robust account of this law and literature.
[35] Quoted in James Oldham, "Reinterpretations of 18th-Century Contract Theory: The View from Lord Mansfield's Trial Notes," *Georgetown Law Journal* 76 (1987-88): 1956.

as nonfeasance fell out of relevance, it came to be argued that failure to repay a debt constituted deceit, since the debtor had made a promise which they then reneged upon. Consideration would mitigate this threat and serve as proof of liability. *Slade's Case* (decided in 1602) determined that every contract contained an *assumpsit* and that payment was always owed when goods had been provided—in other words, that a past promise of payment was legally binding into the present.[36]

This may seem commonsense today, but the case took five years to decide in part because little legal precedent existed for conceiving of a promise as a legal category.[37] In medieval common law, a writ of debt had been required to adjudicate such cases, a cumbersome process that resulted in many cases being thrown out on technicalities. But even as the new legal category of assumpsit was packing a claim about deceit into debt litigation, eventuating in the *Statute of Frauds* in 1677, Jacobean judiciaries were also keen on extending greater protections to both debtors and felons, as Barbara Shapiro shows: "Juries consistently undervalued stolen goods or refused to convict….Few felons, in fact, actually suffered the death penalty or permanent mutilation."[38] At the same time, "criminal law relating to riot, conspiracy, libel, and fraud was expanded and developed" in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, as reports from 1593 to 1609 attest.[39] Edward Coke, who had successfully defended *Slade's Case*, "tried, with some difficulty, to reform his own court so as to include pleas of fraud," suggesting that the legal apparatuses for dealing with such cases were still patchy and undependable in the first decades of the seventeenth century.[40] Perhaps knowing this, and reluctant to get the courts involved, Mammon backs off from

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[36] See Oldham, 1957; and David Ibbetson, "Sixteenth-Century Contract Law: *Slade's Case* in Context," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 4.3 (1984): 295-317.
[37] See Victoria Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640-1674* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004).
[38] Barbara Shapiro, "Law Reform in Seventeenth-Century England," *The American Journal of Legal History* 19.4 (1975): 286.
[39] P. B. Waite, "The Struggle of Prerogative and Common Law in the Reign of James I," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 25.2 (1959): 145.
[40] Waite, 145.

Lovewit's offer: "I'll rather lose 'em [my goods]," he tells Lovewit (l. 71); "I will go mount a turnip-cart, and preach the end of the world" (l. 81).

Lovewit's request for a formal writ showing the court's adjudication that Mammon was either gulled or that he "cozen[ed him]self" makes, in other words, a quite onerous demand for a form of proof that wasn't readily available since its legality was still under construction. By unexpectedly pardoning Jeremy/Face, an informal contract in which Lovewit's "grace" is granted in exchange for a rich widow, Lovewit further appropriates adjudicatory power to himself even as he turns a blind eye to the fraudulence that made his own enrichment possible, sanitizing this act of fraud in his praise of Face's "wit" and "good brain" (5.5.150-55)—while still, of course, demanding legal proof of infraction from Face's gulled clients. What I'm suggesting is that these self-promoting turns both toward and away from the law are made possible by the opportunity for gaming the epistemological gaps in the period's legal burdens of proof, which would not fully codify the legal meanings of promise and obligation until the late-eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries. Understanding that the threat of fraud or deceit was already baked into the logic of debt from the sixteenth century forward, we ought to think about the category of the "promise" in terms of both economic and legal risk-taking.

Even more vexing is that, while the law can punish for failure to fulfill a promise, what if the terms of that promise were never what they seemed to begin with? What if actors conspire unpredictably to make its terms hopelessly convoluted, or its infractions unprovable? This is the risk taken by anyone entering into a contract, just as the risk of punishment by a court is run by those who circumvent the law for financial profit. On either side of the guller/gulled relationship, there are a number of troubling questions about what constitutes agreement, debt, and criminal guilt. In the midst of act 5's confusion, the Queen of Faery (Dol in disguise) finally appears to

Dapper, and reminds him that he has promised to return to Face and Subtle a percentage of the profits he will win from gambling—an agreement they had verbally hashed out in act 1. The scammers have, seemingly, fulfilled their end of the bargain: the Queen of Faery has appeared to Dapper, granted him his promised familiar, and now Dapper must pay up. If Dapper had been able to bring the scammers to court, what statute, in 1610, would have helped decide whether he had been *illegally* cheated or whether he made his own ruin with a bad business decision—that is to say, whether he had cozened himself, as Lovewit thinks Mammon may have done? He may not be incorrect. With Subtle and Dol fled and the gulls turned away, Surly finds himself with no recourse and holds himself culpable: "Must I needs cheat myself," he ponders aloud, "[w]ith that same foolish vice of honesty!" (5.5.83-84). There is no legal redress for self-cozening since the perpetrator and victim, as in suicide, are the same person. Taken with Mammon's reluctance to pursue legal redress, Surly's remark about self-deception again speaks to the question of who is culpable for financial loss in cases of fraud.

The concern with the riskiness involved in agreeing to certain kinds of written and especially unwritten agreements reflects a broader cultural shift toward an understanding of the self as constructed by and within social network. As Luke Wilson points out, "where social relations had once been understood as depending on who you were (your status), they were increasingly determined by what you did, that is, by the legal relationships you voluntarily entered into."[41] The rise of assumpsit, or action brought on breach of a contract, around the turn of the seventeenth century was beginning to reconfigure early modern people's relationship to debt by extending the category of liability beyond strictly monetary transaction.[42] Now people could be

[41] Luke Wilson, "Ben Jonson and the Law of Contract," in *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Victoria Kahn and Lorna Hutson (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 144.
[42] See A. W. B. Simpson, *A History of the Common Law of Contract: The Rise of the Action of Assumpsit* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975).

legally indebted to one another based on something as immaterial as a verbal promise, demanding a new degree of care and cautiousness about the lending of credit. As Wilson notes, the highly contractual induction to Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614)—"It is covenanted and agreed," "It is further agreed," "It is further covenanted, concluded, and agreed," says the scrivener to the playhouse audience—reflects the topical pull of assumpsit. But the word itself also appears in *The Alchemist*, where Face, as part of his conning of Dapper, pretends that he will contract with Subtle "upon no terms but an assumpsit." "Your humor must be law," Subtle replies, and takes Dapper's four angels (1.2.69-70). As the medical language of humors enters the sphere of contract law, the body is both centered and decentered from the act of exchange; Dapper hands over the money, but there is nothing material exchanged between Face and Subtle—just a spoken agreement, and a staged one at that.

The exchange is, of course, meant to pique Dapper's curiosity and secure his belief, and that is the satirical point. If the legal weightiness of even a verbal promise gives speech a certain authority, language nonetheless remains oblique and manipulatable. What appears to be a spoken agreement between two business partners might actually be an act of theater between two frauds. Rogue literature, with its dictionaries of cant, sought to decode criminals' jargon for a leering audience, but the city comedy is interested in what happens when the criminal himself is unidentifiable as a criminal.[43] The dupes of the play don't know to even anticipate the epistemic slips they encounter, where the speech-world of contract law and business *is* that of criminal fraud, because the imitation is so seamless. The only person in the play to detect the scam, Surly, is himself a "gamester," as if to suggest a parity of methodological strategy between scam and games.

[43] As Agnew puts it, "rogue literature projected the impression of a mobile and predatory subculture the occupational mysteries and arcane idiom of which required careful and methodical translation before a literate audience could be expected to understand them" (66).

But, with Surly's failure in act 4 to expose the scammers by using their own strategy of disguise against them, this parity is also rendered into its own deflating parody. It may take a gamester to see through the veil of theatrical smoke, but seeing is not enough; the game can only be won by actually outwitting all opponents.

Perched on an unseen epistemic branch, how then do the plays' scammers produce their dupes' belief? The short answer, I offer, is that they don't; their gulls are ready to credit their goods and services without any need for rhetorical or other kinds of persuasion. Belief is, in many ways, assumed; it is already there. The scammers do quite a lot to reinforce it, but it is doubtful in most cases that they actually produce it, *ex nihilo*. It is important to recognize this distinction—that city comedy's gulls in most cases enter the play as believers, rather than fall prey to persuasion—because it is easy to mistake their epistemological having for exchanging, as most readings do. The shift is almost imperceptible, since a certain naïve surrendering of belief is undoubtedly what makes the con-tricks on them possible in the first place. But what, exactly, do the gulls believe, and why do they believe it? And do we see their patterns of belief easily exchanged for others over the course of the play?

The quick answer to this second question is no, even if the stakes of the inquiry demand a certain amount of contextualizing. What I mean to articulate is that the credit economy assumes so many "kinds" of credit—understood both as financial transaction and as a cognitive and emotional function, the placing of trust in someone else—that it matters whether, when, and how belief changes, where it originates, and how it drives the city comedy forward. Jonson's city comedy might be usefully contrasted, in these respects, against his masque *Entertainment at Britain's Burse*, whose concerns, despite the genre difference, are similarly about the epistemic demands of commercial exchange. As "both a proto-consumerist fantasy and a market analysis,"

in Baker's sophisticated reading, the masque interrogates "the epistemic conundrums of the Asian trade" by awakening its audience's consumerist desire in order to force a reckoning with that desire.[44] Staged on-site at the New Exchange, London's response to Antwerp's famous Burse, the masque parades before a gawking audience the very commodities its Shop-Boy advertises. What *Britain's Burse* plays on, in other words, is the producibility of market desire in an increasingly unsettled, defamiliarized, globalizing economy, epitomized in the Shop-Boy's enticing question: "What doe you lacke?" The imagined consumer here responds to the bid by professing, and hopefully acting upon, desires they didn't know they had, desires that are procured and shaped in the moment of vociferous advertisement. Did anyone want or need the Burse's "veary fine China stuffes" before these exotic commodities appeared for sale? Crystal Bartolovich, drawing from Agnew's notion of the placeless market, offers that "struggles surrounding the Exchange were one way that Londoners were coming to terms with an increasingly abstract market as a force that was seemingly external to themselves, impersonal and independent: alien."[45] As she reads it, the Exchange operated as a site of conflict between the sensuous local and the more abstracted global: while it brought a certain immediacy to goods from far-flung locales, these were peddled by merchants generally "viewed as suspect boundary-transgressors" with a strange and possibly dangerous affinity for the foreign.[46] "China stuffes" could mean almost anything on the Exchange, and that was part of their appeal—and their peril.

To do business in such a place was to subject oneself to potentially corrupting influences and thus entailed its own kinds of risks, but the point I want to make is that such representations of global transaction usually imagine an impressionable desire that can be produced and

[44] Baker, 101.
[45] Crystal Bartolovich, "London's the Thing: Alienation, the Market, and *Englishmen for My Money*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71.1 (2008): 143.
[46] Bartolovich, 141.

manipulated by advertisement. Important differences come into view, however, when we shrink the global scale down to more limited urban transactions. In the economies of the city comedy, goods and services (and inheritances) are for sale, but they are not usually advertised, peddled, or hawked. They don't need to be. Rather, *Volpone*'s legacy-hunters, knowing how things work in Venice, act in economically rational ways as they pursue the inheritance of the man they believe to be dying; and *The Alchemist*'s Epicure Mammon, already convinced before the play even begins of alchemy's power to transmute gold from base metals, has every reason to believe that the magus Subtle can proffer him the materials of transmutation. Their belief is, in fact, not only epistemologically justifiable but indeed an indispensable resource of the early modern economy of credit, even if a terribly vulnerable one. As one critic puts it, "although trust may always be betrayed, it is still necessary. That is the familiar paradox."[47] Any credit economy will simply not function when credit is not given; and yet to give it is always an act of risk-taking, not only because others may prove deceptive, but also because belief (even very confident belief) can already run itself aground on incorrect epistemic assumptions.

By this metric, the question of the gullibility of Voltore, Corbaccio, Dapper, Mammon, Fitzdottrel, and all of city comedy's dupes assumes a complicated new shape. Jonson's fondness for beast fable, and his comedies' reliance on the conceits of hunting, fishing, trapping, and ensnaring, poetically capture the relations of predation upon which urban capitalism is built, which demand an actor who gets scammed and another who does the scamming. But, as we also saw in *Volpone*, there is considerable opacity in the credit-relations that lay the groundwork for such predation, producing ways of knowing that can be difficult to quantify. If *Britain's Burse* presents a world where belief is made, shaped, and handed over in the act of commodity advertisement, the

[47] Richard Waswo, "Crises of Credit: Monetary and Erotic Economies in the Jacobean Theatre," in *Plotting Early Modern London*, 70.

city comedy tends to exploit a belief that comes into the play ready-made, if fragile as a porcelain vase. Importantly, this vulnerability extends not only to the plays' gulls but also to its cons. "Have you together cozened all this while," Dol asks Face and Subtle as they squabble at the opening of *The Alchemist*, "and shall it now be said, / [You]…cozen yourselves?" (1.1.123-25). With their venture always on the brink of collapse, the company of rogues must balance their legal precarity against the credit they demand as much from their gulled clients as from each other. To act in financial bad faith is to compromise one's legal personhood, as Face reminds Subtle when he threatens to turn him in for "laundering gold and barbing it" (l. 114). *I know you are a counterfeit*, Face seems to be saying, and this makes you both uncreditable (even to me) and susceptible to be hanged; remember that this economic partnership makes us also legal threats to one another. Volpone admits his guilt in court precisely to drag down Mosca in the same way, fully unraveling the carefully-spun fabric that had enabled them both to prosper financially.

Emily Nacol posits that "all trusting relationships" are characterized by "shifting power relations and asymmetries," so that "we often best understand what trust entails retroactively—that is, when it is already broken beyond repair or when it is so strained that it might snap."[48] If John Locke, as Nacol argues, was among the first to formalize this understanding of the credit-relationship as a potentially risky one, I suggest that it had already been dramatized in the Jonsonian city comedy. *The Alchemist* raises its curtain on a venture so strained that it runs the risk of deceiving itself, of losing its advantage as predator and becoming prey. In the city comedy, profits are made only when credit is conferred tentatively and withdrawn when advantageous—that is, when financial decisions are made from a position of distrust. And yet too much distrust will sink the ship. How, then, is one to mediate between these?

[48] Nacol, 42.

In the category risk we find at least a partial answer, since in risk danger is turned into opportunity. The relationship between the two is always a temporal one, in which present danger is suffered in the hope of future payoff. The need for good calculation is thus imperative: too much danger may result in failure, but too little danger may mean that the profit is not worth pursuing. To this end, it is notable that *The Alchemist*'s prologue begins by banishing "Fortune." In its context, Jonson the cranky author, in an antagonist relationship with his audience, is simply demanding that his play be treated judiciously. "Fortune, that favors fools, these two short hours / We wish away, both for your sakes and ours, / Judging spectators; and desire, in place, / To th'author justice, to ourselves but grace" (prol. 1-4). Yet the best way to read these lines, I think, is as a double entendre: the embattled actor wishes away the disapproval of his audience, but Face, Subtle, and Dol (any of whom may have spoken the prologue) also wish away any of the unpredictable reversals or reveals that might expose their scam. Jonson has made the play's prologue, like its cons, speak from both sides of its mouth: this is about affirming Jonson's authorial craft alongside the craft(iness) of his tricksters. If Volpone at first outwits but is later undone by the law, *The Alchemist*'s cons here seem to profess a latent desire for a judiciary that will both mitigate Fortune and extend "grace" for their own criminal infractions. It is an irrational request, since it asks for the reconciliation of what the play goes on to identify as irreconcilable: risks against law and risks for financial profit. It matters, though, that their desired judiciary is the omniscient playhouse audience. Enabled but also hampered by secrecy, the scammers know they can come into grace only by breaking through the epistemic wall that compromises their legal personhood but enables their financial mobility. Some sympathy for this quandary is what they have appealed to here.

For their victims, however, as we've seen, the law proves no effective recourse, and other resources must be sought to combat the depredations of cheating. To neutralize the "hollow dice" and "frail card," Sir Epicure Mammon has sought the resources not of law but of alchemy, the profession at the satirical center of the play and an additional source of epistemological trouble for its rendering of bioeconomic relations. Costumed as an alchemist and expert in its jargon and methodology, Subtle at many points in the play seems actually to be conducting alchemical experiments, as the laboratory explosion in act 4 attests, making him in some way a "real" alchemist in spite of himself. Like Volpone performing as Scoto of Mantua, Subtle renders his body into that of *the alchemist* (a cultural script) so adroitly that he in fact blurs the line between sincere and sham alchemy. Owing to the convincingness of Subtle's performance, it's hard to say whether the play is a satire on alchemy itself or whether it is a satire on anyone who lends their credit to someone dressed in the robes of the alchemist. "Rather than I'll be brayed, sir," says Surly to Subtle, attempting to make Mammon see the light, "I'll believe / That alchemy is a pretty kind of game, / Somewhat like tricks o' the cards, to cheat a man with charming" (2.3.179-81). Is Surly here attempting to dissuade Mammon by condemning alchemical science as a set of inherently false propositions, or is he insinuating knowledge of the financial scam which only enlists alchemy as a useful framework? Is the play, in other words, a satire on belief, or on belief in the transparency and incontrovertibility of financial transaction?

In my attention to the law's ambivalence about adjudicating matters of fraud, I have been assuming the latter. This is not, however, to displace the former, but rather to show how complex the play's treatment of the epistemology of social relations is. Katherine Eggert has proposed a quite useful term, "disknowledge," to help make sense of these complex networks of belief and unbelief in their social (rather than strictly epistemological) uses for early modern life. As she

defines it, disknowledge is a phenomenon in which a person knows something to be untrue yet believes it anyway, a state of mind very close to what psychology terms cognitive dissonance, though Eggert proposes that it can manifest on a broad sociocultural rather than merely individual-pathological scale. "Disknowledge is, in the end, a deliberate means by which a culture can manage epistemological risk," Eggert argues.[49] Faced with new, ever-accumulating material and ideological imports from the New World or from Jewish and Islamic "outsiders," many early modern English people chose to remain within their familiar but knowingly outmoded knowledge-systems in order to avoid the perceived dangers of the new. The mechanisms by which they accomplished this were many, fraught, and complex, but alchemy emerges time and again as the *sine qua non* of this culture of disknowledge since, for many early modern writers, "alchemy can be, all at once, true (a practical art, protoscience, or syncretic philosophy), false (a delusion or a con game), and unprovable (a literary model)."[50] For Eggert, alchemy's flexibility as a practice with many concurrent uses and meanings made it particularly attractive to those who felt buffeted by throngs of competing discourses that each claimed a premium on truth. Alchemy itself emerges as a tool of risk management.

While Eggert is less interested than I have been in the economic relations that take up this epistemological tangle of knowing and unknowing, her notion of disknowledge as willed belief can be usefully applied to the encounter between fraud and greed that city comedy stages. Without going as far as saying that Epicure Mammon is only paying lip service to claims about the virtues of the philosopher's stone, it is nonetheless the case that he is motivated *primarily* by financial gain and the social credibility it will bring him, so that his gullibility (literally, his ability to be

[49] Katherine Eggert, *Disknowledge: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 9, 10.
[50] Eggert, 6.

deceived) comes less from any inherent naivety or artlessness than from making a (losing) gamble in an economy of always-inherently risky transactions. Ironically, Mammon makes the gamble in the first place out of a desire to simplify the very transactional complexity that ultimately undoes him. The quasi-mystical power of the stone, by making him and Surly rich, will (he thinks) usher in a radically new world, as new as "*Novo Orbe*" and "the rich Peru" (2.1.2), in which massive amounts of bullion will eliminate the economics of "Sword and Hazard," or violence and risk, altogether (l. 18). An economy of vulnerable credit, where the infractions of bad credit are punished by the sword, will bend to the rationalizing, procedural instruments of alchemical transmutation. The additional irony here is that massive amounts of bullion had already been imported into Europe from the real Peru, producing such massive inflation that most of the bullion was exported to China, with the resulting economic damage contributing in large part to the economy of "Sword and Hazard" on which Mammon and Surly now grudgingly rely. Still, if Mammon is not a particularly sophisticated economist, he is lured into a certain economic fantasy by the claims of a proto-scientific practice that still had plenty of respectable adherents in 1610. While, in her own reading of this play, Eggert is certainly correct that rhetorical sophistry is at the center of the cons' practice, *The Alchemist* also wants to discredit alchemy's pretensions to solve the economic crisis wrought by the limited circulation of coinage in England, as Mammon's naïve fantasy about infinite bullion suggests. The critique is somewhat prescient, as efforts to increase the gold supply via alchemical transmutation would be articulated most vociferously, by the Hartlib Circle among others, around the mid-seventeenth-century.[51] It is in this sense that Jonson's play mocks its gulls not for believing too readily, but for believing wrongly: they hinge their economic success on alchemy's not-yet-proven ability to transmute base metals into gold. They

[51] For a more detailed history of this see Carl Wennerlind, "Credit-Money as the Philosopher's Stone: Alchemy and the Coinage Problem in Seventeenth-Century England," *History of Political Economy* 35 (2003): 234-61.

take bad risks and make unwarranted investments, and anyone who looks or speaks like an alchemist suits their already dubious purposes. They are not so much cozened by the scammers as they have already cozened themselves.

Nonetheless, the play has trouble articulating why this is the case. When Mammon declares that Surly has "no faith" in alchemy (2.3.123), Subtle asks him a pointed question: "Why, what have you observed, sir, in our art, seems so impossible?" (l. 125). It is a demand for epistemic generosity, and Surly's answer, while self-assured, does not exactly meet its challenge: "But your whole work, no more," he quips (l. 126). Subtle then launches into an impassioned apologia for alchemy that spans some 35 lines, and here we find Jonson relishing the poetry of the very thing we all know is a sham:

> Nature doth first beget the imperfect, then
> Proceeds she to the perfect. Of that airy
> And oily water, mercury is engendered;
> Sulphur of the fat and earthy part; the one,
> Which is the last, supplying the place of male,
> The other of the female, in all metals.
> Some do believe hermaphrodeity,
> That both do act and suffer. But these two
> Make the rest ductile, malleable, extensive.
> And even in gold they are; for we do find
> Seeds of them, by our fire, and gold in them,
> And can produce the species of each metal
> More perfect thence, than nature doth in earth […]
>
> (ll. 158-170)

This all sounds well and good, Surly retorts, but it turns into contradictory babble when other alchemists are consulted. "What else are all your terms," he asks, "Whereon no one of your writers 'grees with other?" (l. 183). Subtle is, again, ready with a defense:

> Was not all the knowledge
> Of the Egyptians writ in mystic symbols?
> Speak not the Scriptures oft in parables?
> Are not the choicest fables of the poets,
> That were the fountains and first springs of wisdom,

Wrapped in perplexed allegories?

(ll. 202-07)

Before Surly can respond, Dol "appears at the door" (l. 209, SD); the debate is cut short. It is hard to guess how Surly might have responded, since Subtle's argument, though part of the play's satire of alchemical sophistry, is one that held a lot of water across the spectrum of early modern epistemic inquiry. The last three lines could be lifted directly from Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*; the preceding line about Scripture was a mainstay of both Catholic and Protestant hermeneutics alike. Toggling between humility before the sublime and an elitist, coterie secrecy, the principle that valuable knowledge is necessarily hidden and can be accessed only through labored interpretation makes its own profoundly economic assumption: like gold hidden deep in a mine, or transmuted through secret formulae from base metals, knowledge worth having comes at high cost. By stopping the debate here, the play in many ways gives Subtle the upper hand: his objections met, Surly is reduced to repeating that he will not be "brayed," or else is cut off from speech altogether. Unable to find an adequate rebuttal, he simply insists that he will not believe or let himself be tricked.

Yet Surly's avowal—"I would not willingly be gulled" (2.1.78)—forces reconsideration of what it means to be a gull in the first place. Is Surly here generally declaring his own imperviousness to deception, or might he think Mammon is a "willing" participant in his own duping—that there is, to again invoke disknowledge, something volitional in his subscription to what he must know is patently false? Surly repeats some version of this avowal throughout the play, and Face and Subtle even mock him for it in private: "O monsieur Caution, that will not be gulled" (2.4.14). His avowal is nearly always kept in future or future conditional tense, a play on "will" as willpower but also, perhaps, as contract, exhibiting "Jonson's obsession with futurity and

with the play between epistemic and deontic modalities of the verb 'to will.'"[52] Ingenious as Subtle's arguments are, the play, through Surly, repeatedly insists on reducing them to the question not of credibility per se, but of efficacy: will you let these specious arguments gull you, or will you not? Will you enter into such a contract?[53] Mammon, for his part, is always rhetorically aligning himself with Subtle, averring that he too has explained things to Surly precisely as Subtle has: "Sir, so I told him" (2.3.200); "I urged that" (l. 208); and so on. Though he surely doesn't realize it, Mammon reveals here that he too can play the alchemist, that he is rehearsed in their argumentation; that he is, therefore, perfectly capable of swapping positions with the very Doctor who is scamming him. Mammon could be, and probably is, merely regurgitating alchemist orthodoxy (or the bits of it he has picked up), but so is Subtle. This doesn't preclude the possibility that Mammon is, in some volitional and even calculating way, *letting* his greed for a potentially lucrative outcome shape his belief. After all, if alchemy's procedures really do work, why is he so invested in ensuring that Surly also believe? Why the debate with Subtle? It is almost as if the will to believe, which Mammon forces in himself, must also be externalized onto another party—that the epistemic compromises he risks in hope of payoff will find surety only in corporation with others. Their shared belief will, he thinks, enable a new and more confident risk-taking enterprise. Though absurdly equipped with the things of the past—an alchemical "treatise penned by Adam" and "a piece of Jason's fleece" (2.1.83-89)—Mammon, too, is often speaking in the future tense: "This day you shall be *spectatissimi*" (l. 8); "You shall no more deal with the hollow die"; "This

[52] Wilson, 155.

[53] Eggert's book, published a year before Brexit and the 2016 U.S. election, worries about the possible abuse of disknowledge in roughly the form of what would come to be dubbed fake news: "[T]he reader will quickly recognize how the habits of disknowledge impinge in damaging ways upon current learned discourse," she writes. "When any scientific theory, no matter how well founded, may be viewed as a conspiracy theory, disknowledge can be a valuable way of shoving it aside" (13).

day, thou shalt have ingots; and tomorrow, / Give lords th' affront" (2.2.7-8). Though he speaks with the confidence of surety, the future is always still to arrive.

I don't mean to suggest that every disposition toward an uncertain or unrealized future ought to be read as an encounter with risk. However, when financial motive inspires a turn toward a future that is potentially dangerous or harmful, we approach something very close to it, even if we are not yet concerned with the forms of financial speculation or risk assessment that will characterize risk in a later period of capitalist development. Of note in this regard is the way the play sutures the mythic past, or folkloric and magical practices, to the early capitalist profit-motive, not only in Mammon's heroic fleece but also in Dapper's desire for a familiar that will aid him in gambling, in Drugger's plan to have his tobacco shop arranged "by necromancy" (1.3.11), and (somewhat differently) in the Puritan Ananias's smear against Subtle's alchemical jargon as "heathen Greek" (2.5.16). Skilled not only in transmutation but also in necromancy, chiromancy, metoposcopy, and cunning, Subtle's practice comes within a hair's breadth of witchcraft—a point I don't mean to belabor except to recall the affinity between magic, gambling, and con-artistry that Coke's *Institutes of the Laws of England* lumped and punished together. Aside from differences in practice, each of these attempt, in their own ways, to produce a knowable future. While insurance contracts on lives and merchandise were beginning to produce new economies of risk in the late-sixteenth-century, gambling had long been a subject for inquiry (and censure), often theorized within the same conceptual spaces as magic and witchcraft. Johannes Hartlieb's *Book of All Forbidden Arts* (1456), for example, while dedicated mainly to questions of "nigramancy" or black magic, also includes several chapters on gambling and lot-casting. The first of these, chapter 42, asks whether casting lots is permitted by Scripture:

> The teachers of holy Scripture answer that there are many forms of casting lots, as when it is done over inheritance and property and merchandise, that are not sinful

> but allowed. But when casting lots is done to investigate secret things, such as theft, to determine which person has stolen goods, or when a person wants to cast lots to determine if a spouse has broken marital fidelity, doing it in these and similar matters is forbidden and decidedly a sin. And the doctors believe this because the evil Devil involves himself in all situations of doubt, and whenever there is fickleness and instability of people's senses, and in all these cases he incites, aids, and guides toward evil.[54]

For Hartlieb, lots ought to be an instrument of decision and not of capitulation to mere chance or luck, which, strictly speaking, doesn't seem to exist at all; the devil emerges instead as an explanatory force for why lots sometimes implicate innocent people in questions of disputed guilt. There is no such thing as true chance, then, and the use of lots must reflect that certainty.

Scam, though a very different beast, similarly attempts to eliminate the incursions of chance altogether. It thus entails a curious stance toward risk, because while its purpose is to rig the game in one's favor, doing so also means putting oneself in harm's way, exposing oneself to hazard. But even apart from outright fraudulence, the question of creditability must have been a rather confounding one in an economy where even being in debt (as almost everyone was) was considered a form of fraud.[55] Jonson is invested in the satiric potential opened up by the cultural, economic, and legal spaces of play that this epistemic problem of (dis)creditability generates.

IV. A POSTSCRIPT: PLAYING CARDS WITH CARDANO

I have not had the space to say much about Jonson the author, though he looms large in the canon of English drama and indeed of English literature, the first Poet Laureate of England and the first to collate and publish a volume of his own *Works* (1616). Though Samuel Taylor

[54] Johannes Hartlieb, *The Book of All Forbidden Arts*, in *Hazards of the Dark Arts: Advice for Medieval Princes on Witchcraft and Magic*, trans. Richard Kieckhefer (University Park: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2017), 48.
[55] Muldrew estimates that in the period from roughly 1575-1635, the annual rate of litigation in England averaged to one lawsuit for every household, making it the most litigious period in English history (*Economy of Obligation*, 236).

Coleridge would identify *The Alchemist* as one of the "three most perfect plots ever planned," Jonson had a legendarily strained relationship with the theater and seemingly held a good deal of contempt for its audiences, spitefully penned in his "Ode to Himself": "Come leave the loathéd stage, / And the more loathsome age….'Twere simple fury, still thyself to waste / On such as have no taste."[56] He thoroughly objected to the very practices of con-artistry that he staged to such comically dynamic ends, although he himself was no stranger to the court of law, having been spared a prison sentence or worse for murdering a fellow actor only by pleading benefit of clergy. A painstaking writer, a neoclassicist well-versed in Latin and Greek, he demanded respect as a serious author and assumed an unprecedented degree of authorial control over his literary and dramatic output, as the publication of his *Works* suggests. Many of his contemporaries, however, were unwilling to grant him such respect: as Rosalind Miles recounts, he was mocked by his rivals as "a mere empiric," "a mere translator," and a "plunderer," someone who "laboriously patched up his own work out of bits of others' efforts, a costive compositor and no true creator."[57] There is a way in which Jonson's career performs the same kind of balancing-act between work and play that we also encountered in Thomas More: gracing his serious subject matter with a playful levity, he nonetheless insisted on a certain kind of interpretive reception. But where More, we recall, threatened to burn his own books rather than have them fall into heretical hands, Jonson turns to print as a kind of security against the protean unpredictability of the theater with its (as Jonson saw it) shifty, volatile, and censorious audiences. Ranjan Ghosh has usefully labeled this stance an "aesthetics of ant*agonism*," reflecting Jonson's desire to "mak[e] poetic intention grow in

[56] Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Specimens of the table talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2 vol. (London: John Murray, 1835), 2:339.
[57] Miles, 1. Miles quotes "a mere empiric" from the anonymous author of the satirical comedy *The Return from Parnassus*; "a mere translator" from Thomas Dekker's *Satiromastix* (1601) (one of Jonson's theatrical collaborators, John Marston, also "accused him of 'filching by translation'" [Miles, 1]); and "plunderer" from Thomas May (Miles, 2).

apposition with the reader's reception: the success and worth of a poem depending on the 'correctness' of the reader's reading of the writer."[58] Jonson, apparently, felt that he had more control over a readership than over an unruly playhouse audience.

It is perhaps not surprising that such a combative figure would take to the acerbic form of the epigram, of which Jonson wrote well over one hundred, calling them "the ripest of my Studies" in his dedication to the Earl of Pembroke. Epigram CXII, "To a weak Gamester in Poetry," typifies Jonson's antagonistic relationship not just with his audiences or readers, but with his writerly rivals, imagined in terms both of mercantile rivalry and of playing at cards. The pacing of the poem, its use of repetition and rhyming couplets, gives it the feel of a chess match, but one that has lost its truly ludic character as the rival poet, the "weak gamester," merely mimics the moves of his competitor. In order to give a sense of these formal qualities, I reproduce the epigram in full:

> With thy small Stock, why art thou vent'ring still,
> At this so subtle Sport: and play'st so ill?
> Think'st thou it is meer Fortune, that can win?
> Or thy rank setting? that thou dar'st put in
> Thy all, at all: and what so ere I do,
> Art still at that, and think'st to blow me up too?
> I cannot for the Stage a *Drama* lay,
> *Tragick*, or *Comick*; but thou writ'st the Play.
> I leave thee there, and giving way, intend
> An *Epick* Poem; thou hast the same end.
> I modestly quit that, and think to write,
> Next morn, an *Ode*: Thou mak'st a Song ere Night.
> I pass to *Elegies*; Thou meet'st me there:
> To *Satyrs*; and thou dost pursue me. Where,
> Where shall I 'scape thee? in an *Epigram*?
> O, (thou cry'st out) this is thy proper Game.
> Troth, if it be, I pity thy ill luck;
> That both for wit, and sense, so oft dost pluck,
> And never are encounter'd, I confess:
> Nor scarce dost color for it, which is less.
> Pr'y thee, yet save thy rest; give o're in time:
> There's no vexation, that can make thee prime.[59]

[58] Ranjan Ghosh, "Ben Jonson to His Reader: An Aesthetics of Ant*agonism*," *The Comparatist* 37 (2013): 141.
[59] From Jonson, *Epigrams and the Forest*, ed. Richard Dutton (New York: Routledge, 2003).

The epigrammist laments that this literary rivalry against an unworthy competitor (the kind of hack whom Jonson would elsewhere call a "Poet-Ape") has become a pursuit from which he longs to "'scape." Weary of being hounded this way, he expresses a half-articulated desire for a more able competitor and thus a more exhilarating game. The question posed to the rival poet in line 3—"Think'st thou it is meer Fortune, that can win?"—intends to educate this rival in the art of more effective gameplay: this is a game of strategy, the poet says, not one of mere chance, as the ending pun on "prime" (a reference to the card game of the same name) also suggests. Of either Spanish or Italian origin and a progenitor of modern poker, prime or primero is a gambling game won either by achieving the highest-value hand or by making one's competitors believe one has the highest-value hand. Jonson thus taunts his literary competitor not by suggesting his work won't find an audience, but by faulting him for not having the sensibility, the particular knack for knowing which move is best and when in the marketplace of writing, that he has. The opening line's turn to "stock" and "venture" reinforces that this ludic or gaming sensibility is also an economic one, that even in literary production a proclivity for taking risks is more profitable than simply aping the moves of someone else.

The epigram reveals a familiarly prickly, though perhaps less familiarly sportive, Jonson, one for whom the literary marketplace has the appeal and exhilaration of a game of cards. In the epigram's latent desire for a more able competitor, we find much the same desire for a particular affect of gaming—a thrill that comes from embracing but also ultimately mastering Fortune, and, through this, mastering also one's rivals—that we find in the Italian polymath Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576), one of the first Europeans to apply mathematical reasoning to games and an early contributor to what would become probability theory. An inveterate, lifelong gambler, Cardano proposes in his *Liber de ludo aleae* that "the most fundamental principle of all in gambling is

simply equal conditions, e.g. of opponents, of bystanders, of money, of situation, of the dice box, and of the die itself."[60] This definition serves to augment the importance of skill in the game, which will be unfairly hampered if playing conditions are not equal. "To the extent to which you depart from that equality," Cardano continues, "if it is in your opponent's favor, you are a fool, and if in your own, you are unjust." And if one becomes aware that one's opponent is unscrupulous or deceptive, it is best to withdraw from the game altogether. "He is the worst man in the world for you," advises Cardano, "and to play with him is not to play but simply to lose your money."[61] The game loses its game-ness when the element of fortune or luck has been wrested from it by the practice of fraudulence; it is only a game when the outcome has not yet been determined, when a certain amount of risk is still on the table.

But if some amount of fortune or luck is necessary in a fair game, so too is it desirable that (as Jonson's epigrammist also insists) Fortune not be given entirely free reign. In a section titled "On Frauds in Games of This Kind," Cardano makes a distinction between those who "carry out very dangerous frauds which are worthy of death"—marking cards, stacking the deck, or (whimsically) "examin[ing] the appearance of a card by means of mirrors placed in their rings"—and those who "know merely by close attention what cards they are to expect," who "are not usually called cheats, but are reckoned to be prudent men."[62] The violence that accompanies this description betrays a certain anxiety about how alike these skills actually are. "Close attention" to the game, the ability to make predictions about what lies ahead, makes a player prudent; a different kind of close attention, memorizing a stacked deck, is "worthy of death." Both approaches attempt to mitigate the hazards of fortune, but one does this in a totalizing way that eliminates fortune

[60] Girolamo Cardano, "The Book on Games of Chance," trans. Sydney Henry Gould, in Oystein Ore, *Cardano: The Gambling Scholar* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), 189.
[61] Cardano, 190.
[62] Cardano, 210.

altogether, while the other enlists the resources of calculation and observation which still allows for a margin of error and uncertainty. So Fortune must be allotted some space: not banished entirely, as the cheat does (recall the prologue to *The Alchemist*), but also not given full control, which, as Cardano says, will only rarely "favor our wishes."[63] The most prudent way is the *via media* between these.

In a certain sense, we have landed again in the grip of Machiavelli. "I am disposed to hold that fortune is the arbiter of half our actions, but that it lets us control roughly the other half," Machiavelli proposes in the penultimate chapter of *The Prince*. This somewhat bland acceptance of moiety turns, however, into gendered violence by the end of the chapter, where Machiavelli decides that "it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you want to control her, it is necessary to treat her roughly."[64] For Machiavelli, then, fortune can be mastered by masculine *virtù*, especially in the form of prudence as Machiavelli had elaborated it only a few pages earlier. "No government," he writes in chapter 21, "should ever believe that it is always possible to follow safe policies. Rather, it should be realized that all courses of action involve risks [*prenderli tutti dubi*]….But prudence consists in knowing how to assess the dangers, and to choose the least bad course of action as being the right one to follow."[65] Cardano had a tendency to condemn Machiavelli's wickedness even as he drew from, internalized, and extended many of Machiavelli's important insights, as Anthony Grafton notices.[66] Both were profoundly concerned with how to best exercise prudence in a world of scheming men and often hostile (female) fortune. But while Machiavelli seeks to demarcate fortune from will and ambition,

[63] Cardano, 211.
[64] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, Second Edition*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019), 82, 85. The original Italian is even crueler, suggesting something like a scene of domestic battery.
[65] Machiavelli, 77.
[66] See Anthony Grafton, "Cardano's *Proxeneta*: Prudence for Professors," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 7.2 (2001): 363-80, esp. 373-74.

Cardano relishes its incursions, which provide "all the pleasure of the game and all the peculiar delights derived from it."[67] Things may turn out well or badly, but this indeterminacy is, for Cardano, a source of pleasure, in contradistinction to the Machiavellian attempt to violently subdue fortune.

City comedy engages these themes rather directly by self-consciously indexing the ways in which gamble, risk, and related forms of financial play are increasingly integral to urban capitalism. Drawing out the adversarial and contestive drives in these forms of economic being, but also their pleasure and profit, these comedies turn the task of predictive knowing into its own high-stakes game. The theatrical representation of productive play in Marlowe and Shakespeare finds its own peculiar expression in Jonson, whose sometimes bitter antitheatricalism seems to have compensated for a sincere desire to find success in the volatile literary market. Jonson's precision, his view of literary production as a "skill" or "craft" and "the end and fruit of [the poet's] labor and study," may seem antithetical to the spirit of risk, much less of play. But writing for a market meant keeping a pulse on the latest trends, as well as (hopefully) outcompeting one's competitors, a stance that Jonson, in spite of his grumpiness and classicizing rigor, was rather adept at maintaining. "Jonson's dubiousness," as David Baker puts it, often "closely aligned with [the] market-driven suspicions" and "commercial preoccupations" of his theater audiences.[68] As the voice of the epigrams indicates, the experience of competitive antagonism that such a marketplace cultivates can be equal parts hostility and delectation.

I have already made mention of the South Sea Bubble of 1720. Jonson's satirical comedy, which exposes a culture of aggression driving economic exchange and yet wrestles with the

[67] Cardano, 232.
[68] Baker, 100. Jonson's view of poetic "skill," etc., comes from *Timber; or, Discoveries made upon Men and Matter* (pub. 1641).

epistemic-legal problem of blame and guilt for fraud, in some ways also anticipates a more immediate pre-Civil War climate where the problem of expenditure and national debt would become acute, and where the profligate king, in the eyes of his opponents, needed to be held legally accountable though there was little precedent for arbitrating his culpability. While there is not enough space to elaborate this theme here, it is notable that the last wave of "good" theater before the eventual closure of the playhouses in 1642 was invested in representing a glitzy, acquisitive, consumerist culture that nonetheless seemed to be decaying from the inside-out. If the tenures of both James I and Charles I are remembered for their flashy spectacle and ostentatious displays of royal power, beneath the surface bubbled a feeling of unrest, class conflict, and a deep cultural volatility that eventuated into Civil War. Jonson's satiric comedy seems to have captured some of the spirit of this cultural volatility in the years when it was still building pressure, before its relations of discredit fully exploded.

AFTERWORD

> "Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again."
> —Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno

A curious tension emerges from within Horkheimer and Adorno's compellingly grumpy analysis of the so-called culture industry under late capitalism. Mass-media entertainment, as they argue, aims to provide some measure of relief from the mechanization of work; and yet, being mechanized itself, it can offer "nothing but after-images of the work process."[1] The result is that "distraction becomes exertion…everyone has to keep up, emulating the smartness displayed and propagated by the production," to the point that it becomes "doubtful whether the culture industry even still fulfills its self-proclaimed function of distraction."[2] I am aware of few statements that better confirm the ambivalent nesting of work within play under the instruments of capital. As the foregoing pages have shown, the tendency for play to become a form of exertion emerges not just in the era of late capital but indeed also in a much earlier period of capitalistic relation-making. It is more doubtful whether Horkheimer and Adorno are right that "culture today," as reflected in the insipid recycling of cinematic tropes and all the other features of mass-produced art, "is infecting everything with sameness"; the claim leans perhaps too heavily on what Raymond Williams would later identify as dominant cultural formations at the expense of emergent and residual ones.[3] But the analysis of human activity as swallowed up by the production process, and thus in a way

[1] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002), 109. Leo Löwenthal would echo this sentiment a decade and a half later: "There is considerable agreement," he writes, "that all media are estranged from values and offer nothing but entertainment and distraction—that, ultimately, they expedite flight from an unbearable reality" (*Literature, Popular Culture, and Society* [Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1961], 11).
[2] Horkheimer and Adorno, 110.
[3] Horkheimer and Adorno, 94.

homogenized, is an important one. Even as work and play seem like distinct spheres of activity, the former bound to a mechanized labor process and the latter to temporary moments of escape, in reality they cannot be this fully or this simply disarticulated.

Horkheimer and Adorno's imagined consumers feel a certain pressure to "keep up," "emulating" the subjects they see onscreen and elsewhere in mass media. This flash of something like an active spectatorship is part of what puts this passage in curious tension, as I have framed it, with their larger argument, which otherwise treats these consumers as passive and distractible. Their eagerness to "keep up" turns them, in a certain sense, into active co-producers rather than merely receptive consumers of culture—a model of limited cultural agency that would be articulated more expressly by Walter Benjamin, for whom film "encourages an evaluating attitude in the audience…but a distracted one."[4] I have glanced only in a sidelong way at early modern consumerism and don't mean to suggest any strict parallels between the Frankfurt School's consumers of mass media and Renaissance England's consumers of theater. Rather, I mean to argue that the folding of play relations into work relations, often only implicit in these analyses, refracts at a later stage the dispositional feeling for play that I have identified in the relations of early capitalism, as represented by the theater and in other domains of cultural and literary production. That there exists such a thing as a capitalist work-discipline, at times violently produced, maintained, and reconstituted and characterized by a sense of clear demarcation between work and nonwork, seems to me undeniable.[5] However, the emergence of a capitalistic subjectivity has not only entailed taking on a demanding "work ethic" in the Weberian sense but also a more omnivorous ingesting of the habits of play and work. The ability to tack back-and-forth between

[4] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction," in *The Cultural Studies Reader, Third Edition*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 73.
[5] See E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (1967): 56-97; and *The Making of the English Working Class* [1963] (London: V. Gollancz, 1980).

these is largely a cultural performance, an inscription of the modes of play onto the working body. Indeed, to return to Sianne Ngai, cultural performance is quite like job performance especially in an economy where work relations are contractual, fluid, temporary, or hard to come by.[6] Economic and cultural spheres of activity are fully constitutive of one another.

I turn to late capitalism here not because it represents the historical apex of the early-modern relations I've described but because it signals, in some ways, a *return* to those relations after a period of relative dormancy. The dramatic rise of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth century put considerable weight on the work-discipline to which I've just referred, subjecting work to a highly instrumentalist systematization, while the concomitant emergence of the so-called bourgeois public sphere especially in industrialized Western Europe stifled some of the expression of play *as* work by privileging discourse over performance. It would be an oversimplification to say that the cultural phenomenon of productive play simply vanishes, only to reemerge sometime around the turn of the twentieth century. However, the twentieth century does witness a historically-significant blurring of the private and public spheres through "the making of an intensely specialized emotional culture," especially within its middle class, that Eva Illouz identifies with "emotional capitalism," a "culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other."[7] As the rational, impersonal public sphere become less differentiable from the emotional private sphere, so too does work become less differentiable from play. Further, as Ngai's analysis of the aesthetic category "zany" implies by toggling between the post-Fordist sitcom and the Italian *zanni* of *commedia dell'arte*, work has been shaped in both the proto-capitalist and late-capitalist eras by an especially high degree of itineracy, movement, and instability—spurred to a significant degree in both periods, if in very different ways, by newly

[6] See Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), 181.
[7] Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 4, 5.

globalizing patterns of labor. Combined and uneven development, to say nothing of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, and so on, have made it difficult to generalize about all work relations, and certainly there are sectors that demand a level of specialization that limits the kind of play I have been discussing. But, to recall Christopher Sly's "transmutation" from peddler to cardmaker to bearherd to tinker (and from there to faux lord), both very early and very late phases of capitalism have put a certain premium on transforming the self for economic gain. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, this transformation might be conceived in terms of mutability; around the turn of the twenty-first, of having a "diverse skill set." Both are responding, each in their own ways and informed by other discourses beyond those of political economy, to the experience of deep economic and cultural instability. This volatility demands, in a word, the subjective embracing of risk.

I feel a certain squeamishness about invoking a late capitalist and proto-capitalist "period," as if either of these have clear temporal boundaries or can be identified with parallel social and economic practices. It is only with the benefit of hindsight that we can even suggest a *development*, however gradual or staggered, of the conditions of 1600 into those of 2000. Nonetheless, by emphasizing that productive play has not been a continuous feature of all capitalistic economies in all periods of development, but is felt sometimes more and sometimes less strongly, I hope to avoid models of historical or economic determinism while also preserving the methodological rigor of dialectical materialism. I've loosely theorized this form of playful relationality in terms of bioeconomics, which registers a certain unease or even contradiction between the impersonality of market forces and the lived, embodied sensuousness of economic exchange. The more intensively subjects are asked to bear the weight of economic gain and loss, the more playfully—that is to say, the more performatively, extravagantly, and riskily—they show up in the act of

exchange. This is a model that, I think, has particular resonance both for early modernity and for our own century, but my hope is that bioeconomic play might be taken up and played with in any other number of discursive ventures.

VITA

Robert Tinkle received both his Masters and PhD in English Literature from Johns Hopkins University. He served for two years as an Associate Editor of *ELH* and has tutored extensively at the JHU Writing Center, where he was appointed Director for 2020-2021. He has taught a number of courses in both compositional writing and early modern literature, including Shakespeare, the early British survey, and Renaissance humanism. He has also presented work at the MMLA and RSA. A version of Chapter 1 of *Fair Games* is published in the summer 2020 issue of the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, under the title "Labor and the Problem of Play in More's *Utopia*."